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IMAGINATION

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IMAGINATION

STORIES OF SCIENCE AND FANTASY

SEPTEMBER, 1953

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**NO SONS
LEFT TO DIE!**
by **Hal Annas**



... a great **ROG PHILLIPS** novel—**THE CYBERENE**

Introducing the

AUTHOR



★
Hal Annas



AUTOBIOGRAPHIC sketches are considered apologies or alibis by the cynical.

Well, I've always needed an alibi and I might as well fix up a good one to cover all circumstances.

I was born in a house beside a stream of red mud connecting two cottonmill hamlets in the Bible Belt of the South. I was young and adventurous and soon moved to a house on a hill overlooking a cornmill.

The mill had a big waterwheel. It was about as tall as a corncrib after the hay has been gathered into the barn. On the same shaft was a wooden pulley. It was bigger than a henhouse even when the hens are setting. Around the pulley went a rope belt and on to a smaller pulley. This powered

the whole works.

To the mill would come rosy cheeked girls in overalls carrying a sack of corn and leading a cow. The cow would eat the husk on the spot and the girls would have to carry only the ground meal back home.

Also would come, astride flopped-eared mules, redfaced young men, a shotgun under one arm, a pair of brass knucks in the hip pocket, and a sack of corn before and aft.

The corn would be emptied into the hopper. Everybody would get ready, sort of holding his breath. The miller would climb upon a box and push upward on the scantling that ran through the roof. That would lift the floodgate.

Water would come rushing down
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IMAGINATION

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of Science
and Fantasy*

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SEPTEMBER 1953

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Front cover by Malcolm Smith, illustrating NO SONS LEFT TO DIE! Interior illustrations by Malcolm Smith, W.E. Terry, and H. W. McCauley. Cartoons by Ludwig, Glueck, Gekler, and Kohler. Astronomical photo, back cover, courtesy Mt. Wilson and Palomar Observatories.

The Editorial

WORD'S been going around that science fiction is entering a doldrum period. We hear it in the trade, from other editors, publishers—and even writers and artists. There seems to be a big scare rampant that science fiction is confined to a “narrow specialist” audience and will never hit the big-time. To us this is a lot of hogwash.

SCIENCE fiction is on the threshold of a “big boom” that will be a staggering thing to behold. But it's not going to come overnight, as indeed it did not back in 1926 when the first science fiction magazine was published. For over twenty-five years the “child” has been growing, learning, expanding, becoming (a difficult feat) an expected household word; it has in short, been establishing its niche in the American (and International) way of life.

THE atom bomb (regretfully) was the first big push to science fiction achieving recognition. Flying Saucer publicity (while it tended to inject a pooh-pooh attitude in general) added impetus. But the really big thing that's going to push it over the hump and into the “millions of readers” class, is the coming first trip to the Moon. So all right, we can hear the skeptics laugh now at this lat-

ter observation and perhaps voice the opinion: “Perhaps you're right, but who's going to wait around that long?”

WE are, for one. We know it's coming, and we feel it won't be too long in its arrival. And when it does come you're going to see the biggest “band wagon” ride in literary history. Why? Simply because the large mass of any population is averse to change or new ideas before change. But once the change is at hand acceptance follows automatically—and a frantic acceptance at that. We recall not so many years ago when TV made its initial inroad into the American home, many of our friends—and some of them supposedly science fiction enthusiasts—saying: “You'll never see me buy one of those conversation killers!” But TV came to stay—the change was at hand because the evidence was before their eyes—and these same people today proudly boast of their fancy TV sets. They gave in—because it was the thing to do, going along with the crowd . . .

SCIENCE fiction still hasn't reached that stage where people will automatically “go along with the crowd.” But the day isn't too far off—and even if it is the fact remains that it's coming! So for those who feel that our

"fad" literature is a passing fancy, we have the following advice: Drop science fiction—you're obviously not vitally interested in it, and what you're not interested in you can't have much faith in. Those of us who do have faith—and more important, *know*—will be happy to wait for the big day. That big grin we'll be wearing will be the well-known "I told you so!"

IN the meantime you can look for quite a few changes in science fiction—notably among the many magazines on the newsstands. The big slicks will continue to run it occasionally, television will continue to feature it, and the movies will utilize the new 3-D medium to turn out some thrilling stf films. It all adds up to a slow, but steady trend—all roads converging on M-Day—Moon Day. You can rest assured IMAGINATION will be in there plugging all the way, laughing at the skeptic; maybe that's because we use *our* imagination!

SPEAKING of the fruition of science fiction, the big news of the year is now upon us; the 11th convention to be held September 5, 6, 7, in Philadelphia at the Bellevue-Stratford Hotel. You've got the month of August to make your plans complete to attend the gala festivities. If you've never been to a science fiction convention there isn't much we can say here to describe the fun in store for you. Suffice to say that for three days you *live* science fiction, which is about as much of an incentive as you should need to hop the next train, bus, or plane. Incidentally, you can reserve your room by wir-

ing the Bellevue-Stratford, and the rates are especially attractive for this particular occasion; \$6.00 for a single room and bath, and \$10.00 for a double. We understand the convention activities will occupy a whole floor, so there will be no scurrying around to find the proper place at the proper time.

REMEMBER, it's the Labor day weekend, and it's all for you! So make a date with yourself and get in on the fun. We'll be seeing you there—we hope!

IN the meantime, the October issue of Madge will be on the way to your local newsstand—on sale date August 28th. Be sure and reserve your copy as there's a terrific novel, *THE TIME AR-MADA* by Fox B. Holden, accompanied by a new Smith *photo cover* with an *Interstellar* background. Watch for it! wjh

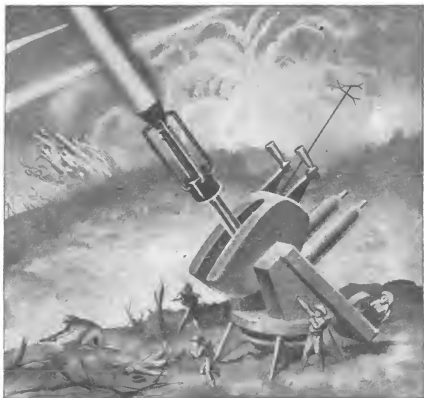




Could mankind hope to survive a galactic war that left boys aged cripples in a few short years? Who would replace them when there were—

NO SONS LEFT TO DIE!

By
Hal Annas



SUSAN Wildress knew that what she was about to do might mean death.

She stopped eating and stared at the ration of ground cedar bark, rabbit, and a hydroponic which tasted like eggplant. She pushed back her plate and glanced around at the tense girl faces in the huge dining hall. She lifted a small strong hand and ran it inside her sweater. She brought out a locket,

snapped it open.

The flesh grew tight around her dark brown eyes and in her olive cheeks. The memory was still as clear as the day it happened. Three years. She was just fourteen, sitting in the groundcar and watching the preparations which were always dramatic.

Darth Brady had lied about his age. He was supposed to be nineteen but was just past seventeen.

She had known and so had everyone else, but the Centers needed boys, needed them desperately.

She remembered how her face got wet as she watched him go out to the ship. He looked very tall and broad and strong, a man. His jaw was firm and his features grim. He looked toward her but didn't wave, for, since she could first remember, there had been a stringent rule against making close ties with boys at the Centers.

Replacing the locket, she rose and walked casually to the exit. She glanced right and left, hurried to the entrance to the factory, reached down her time card and punched in. Then she hurried back across the space to the dining hall, around behind it and on out to the rows of cedar trees.

The penalty, she knew, might be endless restriction, even death, but she didn't hesitate. With trees concealing her movements, she hurried along to the dormitory groundcar ramps. She went more cautiously now.

A moment later she heard masculine voices and a shiver ran down her spine. It was not the voices themselves, but the words they used. *Zeehites*. She had heard the term many times, never without a shudder. Men could be put to death for discussing the *Zeehites* around women or children.

Moving quickly, she slipped be-

tween two cars, slid into the control seat of one. With infinite care she backed it out, rolled it as quietly as possible a hundred yards before setting in motion the vanes that would lift it. She brought it down again in a clearing in the wood at the edge of the heat-blackened plain.

For a time she remained undecided. A score of ships were out on the plain. She had seen from the air scores of others on other plains. Nowhere had she seen one bristling with full armament and scars of battle to indicate it to be the *Ida Bella*, *Nucleus*, *Trilogy* or *Firelance*.

SHE thought of binding her dark wavy hair tight against her head. The thought, she knew, was idle. Nowhere on the planet could she pass as a man, dressed as she was in denims and sweater. Young men wore purple uniforms; those in logistics wore brown.

Dismissing caution, she walked rapidly toward the buildings of the Center. And now she became very careful of her thoughts. She knew that youths developed remarkably at the Centers. They had to if they were to survive out among the stars in that long chain of ships stretched across the course of the *Zeehites*. The boys were said to be telepathic. She didn't know for sure. She knew only that girls had

to be careful of their thoughts around boys.

Pausing between two buildings, she glanced apprehensively at the open compound. Nothing stirred there but she had the eerie feeling that eyes were on her. It was too late to turn back. She started across to the main building.

Young men in purple uniforms materialized from every direction. They neither laughed nor talked; moved with hardly a sound. They completely surrounded her, pressed close. They were tall and broad and she could not see beyond them.

Susan trembled. She started to run, to break out of the circle, but powerful and yet gentle hands restrained her.

"It's a girl from the factory," one said. "Make it casual. Don't crowd. We'll have to get her out of here."

A brief order was snapped. The men moved as one. At the center of the group she was carried along. She knew when they entered a building, but uttered no sound. The men fell back. She waited, trembling.

"Girl," said one, "do you know you could be put to death for coming here?"

Susan stopped trembling, held herself rigid. Long ago she had learned not to cry. There was no excuse for breaking a rule. Her mother had once told her that

things had not always been this way; that if everyone worked hard enough things would soon be again as they were in that bright and free past. To break a single rule was to commit a crime against everyone on the planet and delay that bright future. She waited.

"You're working dayshift in the factory?"

She nodded.

"How many hours?"

"Twelve."

"If you want to make a complaint you have to take it to the Council."

A man who looked older than the others advanced. On his shoulder was the emblem of the crossed pens, indicating he was an instructor. He glared around at the others. "You know better," he said, "than to sneak a girl in here."

Somebody chuckled. "She was on the compound. Did you want her to be discovered and maybe get permanent restriction? We'll get her out safe somehow."

The instructor turned back to Susan. "You'll have to keep mum at the factory," he warned. "A single word and you'll have the Council on our necks."

"But I have to find someone," she said. "From Firelance."

"Oh!" Glum looks spread.

"His name is DARTH BRADY," she went on quickly. "He trained here. He went out three years

ago."

"Darth Brady!" somebody said.
"That gibbering cripple—"

"Quiet!" ordered the instructor.
"The next man that mentions a forbidden subject will go before the Council." He turned back to Susan. "We must get you back to your place."

"But I have to find Darth Brady."

The men turned away, shook their heads. Susan felt a cold numbness growing in her body and limbs.

"You, Carson," the instructor ordered, "get passes for yourself, Merritt and Saxon. I'll issue the order via wrist communicator. Get two groundcars. Wait in them outside the compound. You others form a ring about this girl. What's your name, girl?"

"Susan Wildress. My identification number is on the back of my sweater."

"I'm Alfred Wilson. The boys will walk out to the groundcars. You walk in the midst of them and try to look like a boy. Get in the first car and stay out of sight."

ON the way Sue had an opportunity to study the boys. Most of them were younger than her seventeen years. For their age they were unusually tall and broad. Few were under six feet. Their purple uniforms were emblazoned with a

single splash of white in the center of the back, in the shape of a burning sun.

She slid into the car, remained quiet. Alfred Wilson got in beside her. A moment later the car rose gently, accompanied by another off to port.

Sue pointed to the wood and explained that her car was there. Wilson spoke into his communicator and the other car descended in that direction.

"They'll return it to the dormitory," he said. "My job is to get you back without creating an emergency."

"Why are you doing it?" Sue asked. "Why don't you turn me over to the Council?"

Wilson set the robot controls and turned to face her. "Nobody wants to punish you girls," he said softly. "Members of the Council least of all. But they have to maintain discipline. It's the only way we can get the big job done."

She understood. She had heard it all a thousand times before. No one's feelings, nothing, neither life nor death, must be allowed to halt or hinder the big job, the job that was to bring that bright future.

"Can you tell me anything about Darth Brady?" she said.

"I can tell you only that he wears two ribbons and three stars."

"Two ribbons?" Sue gasped. "Is he dead?"

"No." Wilson's voice was deep, controlled with effort. "No. Darth Brady isn't dead. But, Sue, you must not think about him. You know the rules."

The tight knot in Sue's breast worked up into her throat. She blinked rapidly and squeezed the flesh around her eyes to keep the moisture back. "I know the rules," she said.

Wilson tuned the communicator to the factory. "Tube department foreman," he said, but didn't cut in the viewplate. "Al Wilson, from the Center," he went on. "Sure, Mom, I'm fine. I've borrowed one of your girls. Don't let it get talked about. Will have her back soon."

"Your mother?" Sue asked.

"Yep! A fine girl. She works fifteen hours a day and still finds time to keep records for the Council."

"I thought Mrs. Wilson's boy had gone out. When I was eleven I heard her say he'd already entered the Center. That's six years ago."

Wilson's features clouded. "They won't let me go. Made me an instructor. If the chain breaks—But that isn't a subject to discuss with a girl. Look below. That lake! Know what made it?"

"A strike. My mother said it came before I was born. She said we'd been lucky; that the planet

has been struck thousands of times; that the moon and Mars have taken an awful beating."

"We set up decoys," Wilson explained. "They draw the strikes when a break-through comes. But sometimes a factory gets knocked out."

"I know." Sue nodded. "We know what to do. We've drilled over and over. And most of the factory is under ground."

"Part of it, the brick part, was once a school. I went to school there eight terms before I entered the Center."

"And I went three terms. That's when they converted it and we had to study in the dorm. Kids study in the nurseries now."

"How long have you been working in the factory?"

"Since I was nine. Only had to work four hours a day then. Now children begin work at eight."

"How many hours does your mother work?"

"Fifteen."

"And when you're eighteen years old you'll go on a fifteen-hour shift?"

"Of course. But I'll have three days vacation when I get married."

"Did you know the Center is taking boys thirteen now and next year will begin calling them at the age of twelve?"

"All the girls know about it."

The boys are glad to get out of the factories. They talk about nothing else. And they say the age to go out is going to be lowered to eighteen and maybe seventeen."

"Yes. We're learning better and faster ways to make men out of kids. And the numbers in the crews are being cut down. The ships are better. One man now can perform all the operations three did a few years ago."

"The training? Is it very hard?"

"No. It's just necessary. We know we have to learn and develop in order to survive. It's just like growing up."

SUE hesitated. "Is it true—" She paused again, cheeks coloring. "It is true that you can read a girl's thoughts?"

Wilson grinned. "Don't worry about it. Those things have been exaggerated. We get flashes under certain conditions. If your emotions were in perfect accord with your thoughts, as ours are supposed to be, we'd know what you're thinking. It's our one superiority over the—" He halted, clamped his lips tight. Sue knew he had been about to say, "Zeehites."

"We don't really read your thoughts," he went on. "If it was necessary, and we concentrated very hard, we probably could do it."

"Try just once to get the pic-

ture I've got in my mind."

"That's easy, but you shouldn't have thoughts like that."

She blushed crimson. Now she was positive. She had held an image in mind of his features, and he had known, known especially that her thoughts were of him. Confusion and discomfort settled over her. She tried to get her mind on work, but the thought wouldn't come. Darth Brady's image, as in the locket, appeared before her. And she was certain that that, too, was known to Wilson. She was hardly aware of what he said from then until the car landed.

Other girls watched her enviously, and yet with trepidation, as she returned to her machine. At every pause in the work they asked questions. "How did you get out?" "Where did you go?" "Will you have to appear before the Council?"

She hated to be cattish, but she couldn't confide in them. She invented a story which was reluctantly accepted. She said she had suddenly become ill and gone to the dorm.

The day wore on. After supper she visited her mother in the older women's dorm. She didn't stay long because Mrs. Wilson studied her with too much interest.

But she had asked, "What do two ribbons and three stars mean,"

and her mother had replied, "The first ribbon is for courage and conduct beyond the call of duty. The second is generally a posthumous award. If the wearer is alive, it means he has done something wonderful indeed. The stars, of course, denote the number of years he has spent in the void."

"Any word from Dad?"

"No. Communication channels are overloaded. He wouldn't ask for a priority unless it was an emergency. I think he's setting up a plant near those new mines on the Gold Coast. Then he'll have to go to Mars. They're crying for logistic experts. I'm hoping he can spend a few hours with us, though."

"How about uncle Bob and uncle George?"

"Sue, I was hoping you wouldn't ask that. George has been moved out of the Fourth Sector. You know what that means? His ship will be in the midst of the fighting. And Bob's ship hasn't been reported in months. They were operating in Sector One. It's out near the rim of the galaxy, but has been drawn back billions of miles in months. The losses in the withdrawal were terrible. All I can learn is that the full extent of the losses won't be known for weeks."

"Why do our ships keep on pulling back? We always lose so heavily at those times. Cousin Breck-

enridge gone; Cousin Allison came back a wrecked old man at the age of twenty; dozens of boys I used to know, broken or dead. And now uncle Bob."

"Hush, Sue. The final word hasn't come yet."

"But it will. And then it will be uncle George. And the Supreme Council keeps calling for more ships, better armament, and, above all, more men. Did you know they're lowering the age at the Center?"

"Those things are necessary, Sue. They mean survival. We're not supposed to talk about them. And we're supposed to go to bed earlier because food rations are to be cut again and we must conserve our strength."

RETURNING to her section of the dorm, she passed a knot of girls whispering in the corridor. She caught the words "*Ida Bella*" and "*Trilogy*." Then "*Old men. They look ninety and most are crippled. And not a one is over twenty-two.*"

Hurrying, to keep pace with her heart, she went on to her room. As she slipped out of sweater, denims and briefs, she thought, "Darth Brady was on *Firelance*. Maybe! Maybe—" She knew she was not supposed to hope, neither despair. Nothing that happened must halt or hinder.

The stars beyond the window were bright and close. She thought she could see the rings of blue with white dots in their centers which were said to be visible through a powerful telescope when the fighting was intense.

Next day she applied for an issue of clothes. The elderly woman smiled and shook her head. "You're very pretty. You wouldn't be beautiful but you'd certainly be lovely and feminine in a dress. Wish I could issue you an outfit."

"But I haven't drawn any clothes in over eight months," Sue said. "We used to get clothes four times a year, then twice. Now—"

"It can't be helped," the woman explained. "They've cut production to put more labor and machinery in the heavy industries. Even the boys at the Centers aren't getting as many uniforms as they were. And they'll get fewer next year."

"Oh!"

"If your denims and sweaters have been damaged—"

"No. I've three of each. They are just worn."

"Then you'll have to make out. The less we have here the more the men can have when they go out. You understand?"

SUNDAY she took advantage of the shorter working-day to go

with her mother to the vale between the cultivated rows of cedar and the woodland. She had come here at every opportunity since she could remember. It was here she had been taught that there was something beyond the transient physical life.

Today they walked on through the wood to a point where they could see the lake which had been made by the strike so many years ago. It was more than five miles across and was said to be half a mile deep.

Coming back, they saw a number of uniformed men in the vale. They were gray and wrinkled and some were crippled. She felt her mother's fingers close tight on her arm, but curiosity wouldn't allow her to stop.

She stared. He was stooped, his face a mass of wrinkles, his hair snow-white. And he was gibbering. He seemed to recognize no one.

She was suddenly seized with a tremor. A wild raging impulse surged through her. Blindly and without thought, she ran, heedless of bushes, briars and stones. She didn't stop until she reached the dormitory. She fell face down on her bed and dug her nails into her cheeks and into the flesh about her eyes to make it contract.

Darth Brady was just past twenty, she knew . . .

Night brought a full silvery

moon. She could see it from the window as it came above the wood, bright and giving no hint of the ships and activity on its scorched airless surface. Sleep was out of the question.

Slipping into her clothes and with shoes in hand, she swung across the windowsill and lowered herself to the ground. Like a wraith she moved among the cedars and on across the vale and into the wood.

The sound of the machinery in the factory behind her faded. The night was quiet but lustrous with tinted moonlight. It seemed that peace had come, that nowhere in the universe could there be strife. But as she looked at the stars and imagined the rings of blue and white dots, she knew.

Beyond the wood the water in the lake was amber in color, and as she approached, it flashed an image of the heavens and took on a darker hue, almost blood red.

She stood on an outcropping and listened to the sounds of crickets and frogs and thought she heard long sighs like breathing. She thought she saw something white flash on the surface, then dismissed it, tilted her head back and breathed deep of the clean night air.

It seemed that she was alone on a tiny planet which brushed against a bejeweled velvet curtain. She indulged the dream, and when

reality began to force itself upon her again she quickly slipped out of her clothes and judged the distance to the water below.

For a moment she stood there, arms raised, body poised, the moon painting her figure a rose pink. Then she dived.

The water was warm, caressing. She came up, tossed her head back to get the shoulder-length dark hair out of her eyes. And then she was certain she heard an exclamation.

PANIC ran through her as it had earlier in the vale. She twisted and turned to look in every direction. Then a head bobbed up in front of her.

"A beautiful dive," he said. It was Al Wilson. "I was about to warn you and then I couldn't bear to spoil it."

She was treading water, confused, not knowing what to do.

"Do you come here often?" he asked.

"No. But you knew I would come soon. I was thinking about it when we flew over, and you knew."

"Is it so bad?"

"No. But having you read my thoughts—" She turned swiftly and swam hard and strong. The panic was in her again. She felt that he was looking right inside her, noting the quickening of her heart

that he himself brought.

It was impossible to escape. Like all men trained at the Center, he was superbly muscled and seemed tireless. With ease he kept pace with her, ignored her confusion, talked on.

In desperation she clung to a rough stone protruding from the bank, started to climb out, dropped back into the water and fought to hold back the tears.

He said, "There's an easier place to climb a few yards ahead. I'll go back the way I came and meet you up on the bank."

Relief came as she watched him swim away, watched the long muscles ripple on his back and shoulders. But it did not last. In feverish hurry she climbed out and twisted and squirmed to get into her clothes. She had hardly got the sweater over her head and her hair brushed back when he appeared.

"Those clothes don't do you justice," he said.

Confusion came again.

"But the time will soon come," he added, "when our girls can have all the fine things written about in the old books."

"How can you say that," she asked, "when every report brings news of another withdrawal, another terrible defeat? We've lost so many stations among the stars, there can hardly be any left."

He looked down at the weed-grown earth, and she instantly became contrite. "I'm sorry," she said. "I know I'm never supposed to lose hope."

He studied her eyes until she looked away. His hands found her shoulders. "Sue, there are forces at work about which you've never even dreamed. We need time. We need more manpower. We have to go on working. The only thing that can defeat us ultimately is here on this planet. It is our morale. As long as it is high we'll keep on sending ships out. The moment it breaks we are lost."

Sue had noticed the tension and constraint in his voice that she had come to associate with the talking of men among themselves when they thought no woman or child was within hearing.

Always they stopped talking when a girl approached, and put on a cheerful front. She wondered if they knew of some dark terror yet to be faced, so horrible that it couldn't be confided to their women and children. Would a knowledge of that dreadful thing, she asked herself, break the morale on the home planet?

Wilson had changed the subject. He told her about the fine things he had read in books and heard from older men of that past before the beginning of the struggle. It reminded her of the fairy

tales she had read as a child. It seemed impossible that a girl could have fine clothes and a house and a husband and children all her own. She couldn't grasp it. She felt that she wouldn't know how to live if there weren't rules to go by. She remembered vaguely when she was very small, that her mother prepared meals in a big white kitchen, but there was little reality in the memory.

He accompanied her back to the dorm and on the way talked of things that stirred forlorn unrest in her body. It was a sense of tingling, suppressed under memory of Darth Brady.

Lifting her to the windowsill, he pressed his lips against her ear and whispered, "I've made another request of the Council to send me out." His arms held her tight enough to stop her trembling. Then he released her and was gone.

FOOD became scarcer as summer became fall and fall became winter. Monkey meat was served twice a week. Hydroponics were the main diet and the bulk had to be made up of edible leaves and woodfibre.

First news of the big breakthrough came on Christmas Eve. The bulletin was not supposed to go up until all in the factory had had an hour to sing carols or do whatever they wished. But some-

body made a mistake. Under the wreaths of holly on the bulletin board it told in a few words how Sector One had been breeched. It told of withdrawals, reorganization and shortening of defenses.

On Christmas Day the story was worse. It was not definite as bulletins usually were, but it gave the information that Sector Two was crumbling.

Two days after Christmas she overheard men talking at the groundcar ramps. Their voices were tense, restrained. They said that the links of the chains were snapping and that a strike was sure to come. They talked hopefully of new weapons, better ships that would swing the balance of power in favor of Earthmen.

Sue had heard talk of new weapons and ships many times before. They always seemed to be in the future. She slipped away from the ramps and volunteered an extra hour's work in the factory.

Next day there was a general increase in hours. Girls under eighteen went on a fourteen-hour shift. Eighteen to thirty-five, they worked sixteen hours. Under the age of fourteen, none was allowed to work more than ten hours, but girls and boys of eight and nine could volunteer to work seven hours. Their shifts called for six.

The age for admittance at the Centers was lowered to ten. The age to go out was seventeen, but, as the new classes came along, would be lowered to sixteen and fifteen.

The strike came on New Year's Eve. There was ample warning. Word reached Earth before daylight that a major break-through had occurred. The Fourth Sector couldn't halt it, but forces were being drawn back from Three and Two to close the break.

The news was tempered with assurances issued on a global scale by the Supreme Council. It said that their labors and sacrifices had not been in vain; that thousands upon thousands of Earth warships still stood between the planet and the onrushing enemy. It said that the stations on Mars and the Moons of Jupiter were still intact, as well as on Earth's Moon, and that hundreds of man-made stations were beyond the orbit of Saturn.

The day was one of feverish excitement and at every opportunity fearful eyes turned toward the blue and seemingly placid heavens.

Calculations of when the first blow would come were checked and rechecked. It was expected soon after evening twilight.

News of expressions of confidence among the Upper Councils of the peoples of the planet were

bulletined to still unrest. The Orientals could put aloft better than ten thousand ships in the last hours. The Europeans could do about the same. The Africans had a new ship not intended for service until further tests had been made, but which would be used to meet the emergency. North and South America had more ships than crews, and Arabian boys were being sent to man them.

Sue couldn't understand how her mother could take the news so calmly.

"I've lived through strikes before," she explained. "Besides, your father always comes home to make sure I'm all right afterwards."

AS the sun went down and the first twilight appeared, streamers of fire became visible in the sky above. They crossed and recrossed, endlessly, numbering tens of thousands, and resembled falling meteors.

"I've never seen so many at one time," Sue's mother said.

"What are they?" Sue asked.

"Our ships, of course. From every part of the globe. They'll circle the planet constantly. They are the final inner ring. Under them is nothing but the ground defenses."

"Are there more ships farther out?"

"Certainly. Those up there are comparable to the Fourth Sector on a cosmograph. Sectors Three, Two and One will extend out beyond Pluto's orbit. They are probably fighting now. Listen! There's the warning. We must go to the shafts."

At that moment Alfred Wilson appeared. She understood that he had come to say goodbye to his mother. He came straight toward her, and then Sue realized she was alone. Her mother, with an understanding smile, was already on the way to the shaft.

Sue thought that he had never looked so tall, so strong, so confident. She was certain he had his orders to go out.

He stood before her. His jaw was set, his expression grim. Then his lips parted and he spoke very softly:

"Don't take any worries with you down in the ground," he said. "We'll never let them get a foothold on Earth." He paused. "Sue, don't think about me, don't think about love, don't think about anything—but just one kiss."

She clung to him, giving of her lips, of every thought, of every heartbeat. It seemed to her that it was the least she could do. In another hour he would be out there between her and the Zeehites.

The second warning sounded. She ignored it, still willing to give,

to sacrifice herself if necessary, but he unclasped her hands and brought her arms from about him.

He looked once more into her eyes and then hurried toward the groundcar, walking very straight. He didn't look back and at last she turned and ran to the shaft.

THE trip down required nearly ten minutes. The deceleration began long before the car stopped. She knew that her mother, and other older women, wouldn't be sent down this far, but that children would go much farther.

She hoped she would be put off at a level where there was machinery, where she could work, where there would be something to do to keep her mind off the coming terror.

As she came out of the car in a huge padded vault she was given a container of liquid and told to drink it quickly. Somebody whispered that it was to make them immune to what would otherwise be unbearable pain.

A speaker amplified a voice from the surface. "Girls above the hundred and fiftieth level should lie down or sit down," the voice said. "At lower levels it is safe to stand or walk about as you choose. Those on the upper levels will please get into their shock suits. And please be calm. We'll keep you informed of events

as long as possible.

"The Supreme Council has authorized me to say this: that the strike is going to be unimaginably heavy, but never has Earth been better prepared to withstand one. Each of you has given of your labors to make this preparation. You are each one a part of our combined effort at this crucial moment. Take heart. Remain calm."

Broken sobs came from behind her. Sue turned and saw that they were coming from a girl who couldn't possibly be more than fifteen and didn't belong on this level. An older girl led her away.

Sue thought of Darth Brady, but his image wouldn't stay in her mind. The blue eyes and blond hair of Alfred Wilson were there before her. She imagined him manning a ray-weapon in a ship above Earth's atmosphere. And then memory of the returned men of *Ida Bella*, *Nucleus*, *Trilogy* and *Firelance* sent a tremoring wave of nausea through her.

The speaker blared, "You have a few minutes. Choose your places and lie down or sit down. Remain calm."

A girl nearby muttered. "How do they know for certain? They figured early today exactly when the strike would come. And yet our ships were out there to stop it. How did they know our ships wouldn't stop it?"

A calmer voice said, "Maybe our ships purposely let them through. It may be part of one vast operation. I've heard older people say that something like it happened years ago. They let a whole fleet through and then trapped it between Sectors Three and Two. It was Earth's first big victory."

"But this time they've broken through Sector Four. They can't reach Earth until they're past Sector Four."

"It may be part of an even bigger operation."

"But why let them strike Earth? Don't they care about us?"

"Oh, hush! I have two brothers out there. I'd hate for them to learn girls didn't have confidence in them."

"Attention!" the speaker called. "In forty-five seconds the ground defense will be zeroed in. Please do not get panicky when the earth begins to shake. Lie down or sit down and draw your knees up against your chest. There may be pressure waves. Use your ear-protectors and keep your mouths open. Remain calm."

Silence settled, to be broken by deep breathing, then Sue heard the restrained voices: "God, grant that we shall continue to possess life"

The earth shuddered first one way and then the other. It rocked

back and forth; it rose and fell.

Sue felt the blood hammering through her temples. The muscles in her body strained to hold her knees against her chest. She heard screaming, knew that some of it was coming from her own lungs.

The earth rocked.

Sue felt that she could not possibly endure it longer. She was flung this way and that, bounced as a rubber ball. It went on and on. The girls about her seemed dazed, stricken.

The speaker ordered. "Prepare for pressure within ten seconds."

The earth rocked and then came a jolt that made all the preceding seem as nothing. It came again and again. And then the pressure.

She couldn't breathe. She knew this couldn't go on. It was more than a mortal could endure. Vaguely she wondered how anyone on the surface could possibly be alive. It was unimaginably horrible down here; it could be nothing less than an inferno of death above.

Merciful darkness came down.

THE sheets on the bed were white and crisp and cool. Several moments passed before she understood. She had never been here before. Through the huge windows came bright sunlight. Far out beyond, the ground was covered with snow.

Sue sat up abruptly. A nurse came, lifted back the sheet, checked the identification number tattooed on her hip. "Susan Wildress? Factory Eight Hundred Ninety-six?"

Sue nodded. "My mother?"

"Just a moment." The nurse went away and came back with a memorandum. "Betty Wildress is listed as age thirty-six. That would put her on the eightieth level. None survived above the hundred and seventeenth."

Sue buried her face in the pillow. She had held back the tears so long that now they would not come. She thought of her father and turned again to the nurse.

"Craig Wildress?" the nurse said. "Logistics? Just a moment." She checked through records. "He was here two days ago, stayed by your side. He received a high priority message, had to leave. He left word for you that he would be on Mars for some time."

"Alfred Wilson?"

"Your betrothed or kin?"

Sue shook her head. "An instructor at the Center. He went out the night of the strike."

"There are many Centers. Many went out that night and not so many came back. You will have to inquire of the Council."

"This place? Where am I?"

"Recovery Fourteen Hundred One."

"Is it near—?"

"Site of Factory Eight Ninety-six? Yes. About a hundred and twenty miles east. You must rest now. Girls from devastated areas are to go to factories in the East. You must regain your strength quickly."

From the local Council she learned only that the full extent of the losses would not be known for weeks. Fighting had been intense between Earth and the orbit of Mars and there was still some confusion. It appeared that Mars, the Moons of Jupiter and the stations beyond Saturn's orbit had suffered heavily. The brunt of the strike, she was told, had been absorbed inside the orbit of Mars, and Earth and its satellite escaped what might have been fatal blows.

That was as much as the Council could tell her. No one should expect them, they explained, not without sympathy, to halt assessments and try to learn what had happened to one man in a cosmic operation.

They denied her permission to return to the site of former Factory Eight Ninety-six. They pointed out that such excursions were morale-shattering and that she was needed immediately in the East. Production had to be increased in preparation for further strikes.

They did permit her to view the site on a screen. And then she was

sorry. Where the factory, the dormitory, the cedars, the vale, the wood had been was now a crater twice as large as the lake.

As she studied the scene, an uncontrollable surging rose in her breast. At last tears came. She hardly remembered going out to the atmosphere craft that was to take her to the eastern factory.

The craft was jampacked with girls and older women. Their talk was puzzling.

"Do they lose their spirit out in the void?"

"Maybe it's that stuff shot into them at the Centers."

"But that stuff makes them stronger. Besides, it isn't their strength. Maybe it's us. Maybe we have some hidden psychological reason not to bring more children into existence."

"When I was growing up," said an older woman, "boys and girls were expected to fall in love. Now they discourage it. You can't expect the laws of nature—"

"But that," another pointed out, "is to prevent heartbreak. When a girl is madly in love and the boy goes out and doesn't come back or comes back gray and wrinkled and broken—"

"It isn't our problem," somebody said peevishly.

"If bearing children isn't our problem, whose is it?"

"I meant fertility."

Sue hoped that it was just girl talk, and tried to dismiss it, but half-formed thoughts stirred restlessly and plucked at the strings of some dormant longing inherent in her sex. With the others she wondered.

The new factory differed from the old, and it was several days before she became adept at operating the improved machines. The Center was closer and work was going on to merge the two dining halls.

Word spread that romance might no longer be discouraged. This made her wonder more.

ON the first day of spring a thin blonde girl at the next machine fell unconscious. As Sue rushed to help her, she saw the two ribbons clutched in the thin hand. A chunky brunette whispered, "Her husband's posthumous award. She got them last night, probably didn't sleep."

Work on the dining halls was finally finished. When young men milled into the vast room the girls were silent and shy. The boys likewise. It was the first time many of them had ever eaten in the presence of the other sex.

The shyness wore off and they mingled. It was then that Sue learned that men were fed differently. They got more meat and heaping portions of vegetables. She

no longer wondered why they grew so big and strong.

The men stared at what the girls were eating and seemed to lose their appetites. Finally one offered to share with a girl and then others, all over the room. For the first time Sue tasted beef.

Then a rule was posted that food was not to be shared. The men ignored it, but the girls, fearing both for themselves and the men, stopped sharing.

Word spread that the men had complained to the Council and that something was to be done. Days went by and the men grew irritable. One day the men, looking grim and determined, got their plates and each sat at a table with a girl. When the meal was over they marched out, and not a man had touched his food.

The instructors at the Center declared an emergency, issued orders superseding the local Council that the same food was to be given both workers and trainees. They justified it on the grounds that it was to sustain morale.

Men were allowed in the dorm two hours a day. Sue took the opportunity to ask one how ships were able to traverse vast distances in comparably brief time. His explanation was incomprehensible. Finally he paused, studied her wondering features.

"Oh, I see!" he said. "You girls

don't take much math. Think of it this way. Time is a concept of motion in relation to motion. Picture a motionless planet in a void. There is no motion on the planet or off it. Without motion, plus a concept, there can be no time. Now give the planet motion. Nothing else but the planet is moving in that void. There is nothing to which it is relative. So it can move billions of miles in time zero. Am I making it clear?"

She nodded. She hadn't begun to grasp it, but knew that she would in time.

"So actually we effect a displacement," he went on. "It is something like moving into another dimension, but it isn't precisely that. In reality it is a different kind of motion from motion as we know it ordinarily. But here comes the dorm mother to send us back to the Center. Tell you more next time."

SHE tried time and again to get news of Alfred Wilson, but didn't know what ship he was on and couldn't learn even what Sector he might be in.

All of the sectors now were between Earth and the nearest stars and news of the fighting came more often. There was talk that Sector Four might pull back within the Solar System, and its vast chain of defenses, and thus release

thousands of ships to build Sector One back up to strength.

News from her father came indirectly. A Tibetan sent word from halfway around the planet that he had worked with her father on Mars and promised to bring a message to her. He was in good health and thought of her daily. He was leaving for the vicinity of Jupiter and from there would go to the stations beyond Saturn. He hoped to see her before winter and bade her be of good spirit and firm faith that the big job would soon be done.

Early in June one of the girls on the overlapping shift told her that a man in uniform had asked for her. She couldn't imagine who it might be, for the men she knew at the Center were aware of her hours and would look for her in the dining hall.

Crossing the distance to the hall, she studied the tall man in the worn uniform who stood near the entrance. The hair at his temples was gray and he wore a single ribbon tied at his throat. As she drew near, she saw the light of long and terrible experience in his eyes.

For a moment she could hardly stand. Black spots came before her eyes and the world seemed to spin beneath her. Then she knew she was rushing to him.

A minute passed before he spoke.

"I've had a devil of a time finding you. Searched half the continent."

"Al," she breathed and couldn't say any more.

Lunch was forgotten. She wouldn't have returned to work if he had not insisted.

That evening he ate with her in the dining hall and afterwards led her out to a groundcar. In the car they rose above the factory and up through a snowbank cloud. When they broke clear and could see Luna at thirty degrees in the southeast and Venus sparkling like a jewel in the west, he set the robot controls to hold the car motionless.

After a long moment of gazing at her he said, "I thought of you a lot up there." He pointed toward Saturn. "Long hours of waiting for orders to move to counter some other move. The realization of the vastness, the inconceivable immensity, of space, and how tiny and feeble man is. It made me wonder why the breath of life had been breathed into my body, and I thought of you, and I think it made me understand that our Creator intends for life to go on and upward, and because of that He endowed us with love."

She moved closer to him, but he remained silent so long that she felt a need to bridge across. She said, "Tell me about the night of the strike."

Lines of pain came into his fea-

tures. "Don't ask me about that, Sue. So many of the boys I had trained died that night."

"Oh!"

There was a longer silence. At last his arm came about her. Moments passed and then she understood that no bridge would ever be needed. Words were no longer necessary. She no longer tried to guard her own thoughts.

And when he asked the question it brought no new excitement. She had known that he would ask it, and gave the answer with her lips against his.

"And the date?" he said.

She counted on her fingers. "My birthday comes on the fifteenth. I'll be eighteen. Is it too long? Girls eighteen get special training to prepare them for marriage."

"I can't imagine what sort of training," he said. "Besides. I don't think you need it. Nobody taught you to kiss like that. I've a hunch you have some special aptitude for being a wife. But if your heart is set on waiting—"

"It won't be long. Let's set the date for the twenty-fifth of June."

"It's pretty long for an old spaceman, but maybe I can hold out if I can see you often enough."

"Every evening—"

Sue hardly slept that night. At first she planned not to mention it, but the excitement of keeping it to herself was too much. She

told her roommate.

"You shouldn't have made him wait," said the girl. "Haven't you heard?"

"Heard what?"

"That Sector Four is moving back into the Solar System with headquarters on Earth. That means a lot of ship movements here. He might be called back to his any moment."

"And I didn't even ask him the name of his ship!"

IT was well into the morning when sleep came and then she awoke long before daylight. She studied the bulletin board early and was among the first in the dining hall. She asked a man from the Center what the movement of Sector Four meant.

"It's like this," he said. "All sectors move in perfect coordination. Four is the Supreme Command and Strategy Sector. Planning is done there and the Supreme Council on Earth is kept informed. If they pull back to Earth they can use the ships kept in reserve to protect this planet and release many of the Fourth Sector ships to replace losses in Sectors Three, Two and One. And it is a wise move. Fighting has been extensive of late and more strength is needed far out."

"Does it mean that men on leave may be called back suddenly?"

"Never can tell. Men on leave are always subject to immediate recall."

It seemed that the morning would never pass. At lunchtime she ran out of the factory, looked everywhere, waited at the entrance to the dining hall. At last she went in and ate.

The afternoon dragged. She hardly dared hope when she came out. Then she saw him.

He hadn't priority for a car tonight, and as they sat in a corner of the lounge of the dorm she tried to think of some way to tell him. For a time she hoped that he would bring up the subject, but he didn't, and at last she made up her mind.

Then he said "Sue, you've forgotten so soon that your husband-to-be has a special faculty. You were in so much confusion I couldn't make out what it was at first. But now it's fairly clear. We'll make it tomorrow or next day or any day you wish."

Her cheeks stung so that she was afraid to look up. Finally she said, "Monday. That's three days from now. And Sunday is a short working day. It will give me time to adjust my thoughts to the idea of being your wife."

"Sure. And I understand they give you three days for a honeymoon."

She nodded. "I've been won-

dering what it will be like to be free for three days."

Sunday came. They spent the meditation hours together. The news on the bulletin board was ignored.

In the evening he seemed preoccupied. "They have begun calling men back," he explained. Then: "But don't think for a moment that I'll let them call me before we're married. Still, I wish I hadn't studied up so on the new weapons. They're putting the new ships in service, and—But I'm not supposed to talk about it."

Early Monday morning she drew her wedding issue of clothes: tan linen blouse and slacks; nylox underthings and pajamas; woven sandals and nylox anklets.

As she dallied under the shower she felt guilty, for production had to go on, and every moment she lost had to be made up somewhere.

He came for her at mid-morning and they went before the Council and said their vows. Afterwards they flew above plains and ruins until they reached a city that had not been wholly destroyed. She waited while he filed their identification with the Council and the command post, and then went with him to a huge building which seemed almost devoid of life.

Their suite was luxurious beyond her imagining, and it increased the sense of guilt and unrest in her be-

ing. During the next day and part of the third, as they wandered through galleries and planetariums and stellar-domes, she thought often of the girls at the machines in the factories.

His orders came in the afternoon. She returned to the factory alone.

If such were possible, she worked harder now. Her birthday had come and gone and she was on a sixteen-hour shift. She didn't mind because she wanted the men to have everything they needed to win and hasten the day when the big job would be done.

Food rations became less each day. At first there was grumbling among the trainees, but it died out in the knowledge that sacrifices were necessary and that boys and girls were sharing alike.

The uniforms of the trainees began to look worn. The men no longer seemed quite as big and handsome and vital as they once had.

And then the orders came for clinical tests. The Supreme Council sought an answer to why children were not being born.

THROUGH June she had hoped, and again in July, but in August she was convinced that she wasn't going to become a mother. And when the request came for volunteers to work eighteen and

twenty hours, she took twenty. There were times when she couldn't sleep and wanted to be doing something. This feverishness was shared by others. They seemed almost hysterically eager to produce more, to provide everything the men needed.

The man who registered the volunteers was grim and his eyes were blood-rimmed. As she came out she heard him mutter to another, "There's a breaking point somewhere. We're driving them far beyond their strength."

The other came back, "It's that or death—maybe both."

She got her test in September. It said simply that she was fertile.

Christmas came again, but this time there was no free hour to sing carols. It was like any other day, and the meditation hours on Sunday were discontinued.

A series of strikes came in quick succession, but the protection was better and there was insulation against the pressure. She spent long hours with others huddled in padded dungeons a mile below the surface. She got so she could sleep through the strikes when they were not too close to the factory.

Alfred came back in February. He looked much older, but his hair was not totally gray and his features were not wrinkled. He arranged for special accommodations, and late that night when he took

off his clothes she saw the scars. It was the first time she had cried since her mother's death.

He chuckled her under the chin and said, "This is nothing. You should've seen me before the surgeons got through."

The Council and the Center clashed over the rule that girls should not be permitted to work more than sixteen hours when their husbands were on leave. The Center won, claiming it was a morale factor, and she went back to a sixteen-hour shift.

The age to go out was lowered to fourteen and a half and it was announced that the next class would be thirteen and a half. Boys now were going out with half the training earlier ones had had.

When it was announced that production was catching up and that girls might be permitted to volunteer for training she mentioned it to Alfred. And that was the first time she ever saw his features show fear.

"No. Sue," he said. "Don't even think of it. You can't conceive of what it is."

In irritation she demanded, "Tell me about the Zeehites."

He looked startled. "You mustn't think about them. That's why we are fighting, so our women won't ever have to see one."

"But I have to know."

He understood her thoughts, as

he had in the past, and finally said, "I shan't describe them because there is nothing on Earth to compare them with, and a picture of one would give you nightmares. They have remarkable minds but no emotions. They can concentrate on a single objective and persevere toward it with unbelievable endurance. They are almost incapable of suffering pain and as a result are cruel beyond imagining. They hardly know fear and are terrible fighters. Because they lack a faculty for caution we can trick them, and often we pick up their thoughts and know their plans in advance. Those are the things that have enabled us to survive, for they seem to number as the stars."

"Where did they come from?"

"Andromeda, originally. We know that they spread through the Milky Way millions of years ago. They wiped out life in their paths and colonized. There is evidence to indicate they struck the Solar System at that time. There are things to show they denuded Mars and attenuated its atmosphere. Earth may not have been sufficiently developed then to interest them. We don't know. We know that when Earth began colonizing the planets of other suns in our own galaxy the Andromedians didn't take much notice at first. But as our strength grew they decided

we were a threat. More than a quarter of a century ago they struck suddenly and wiped out hundreds of colonies.

"We were weak at first and our expeditionary forces were annihilated. But we were fast building strength and when they turned toward the Solar System we met them well out. They had not expected so much strength and were turned back.

"Then the race began to build up, and the struggle has been going on since. The tide has turned first one way and then the other, but the populace of Earth has slaved and starved itself to produce ships and man them, and to make better weapons, and the time is drawing near—Sue, I'm not supposed to talk to you like this."

"But, Al, I've heard all those things before: that all we need is just more time, more work and sacrifices."

"Sue, there are forces at work—"

"I know. You've told me that, too, that there are forces at work I don't know about."

The lines of pain showed in his features. Suddenly she realized she was on the verge of tears. She put her arms around him and murmured, "Al, I'll never say anything like that again. I promise."

"No, Sue, don't promise that. Just promise you'll never volunteer to go out, and try not to think of

the Zeehites."

"I promise."

When his orders came and she moved back to the dormitory and went back to the twenty-hour shift, she cried again. It was the third time since the big strike and she began to wonder if she was weaker than others.

THE Fourth Sector established headquarters on Earth and by the middle of April she began to see more men, black, red, yellow, white. All spoke the same language, but their dialects and intonations varied extensively.

She learned to distinguish the guttural of the Teutons, the clipped speech of the Norsemen, the rolling, laughing talk of the Eskimos, the singsong of the Chinese, the jerky tongued-tied speech of the Japanese, the soft tones of the Latins, the softer still of the Africans, all in some way differing from the even, forthright but restrained, speech of the North Americans.

She was particularly fascinated by the Indians. Many were taller and broader than the Americans and were said to be good spacemen and courageous fighters.

They were free to go anywhere when on leave, and nearly a hundred were assigned to the factory-Center dining hall. They were friendly, didn't mind the crowding, and told strange stories of their

homelands. Sometimes they spoke of space battles, but generally were as reticent on this subject as the Americans.

As time went on Sue lost weight. The curves of her willowy figure became less noticeable, and toward June she became more introspective. One day she came out of a reverie to realize she had been staring at a boy across the table. He was small, dark and had noticeably bright brown eyes. His lower features, his slender neck, his undeveloped arms and shoulders told her that he couldn't possibly be over fourteen.

This was not what held her attention. She was staring at the two ribbons tied at his throat and the two stars on the breast of his uniform. As she studied his eyes again she was suddenly shocked into the realization that, however many years he had lived, he was a man full grown, aged by experience out in the void. What his eyes had seen had burned into his soul.

She was ashamed of her own weakness, and determined henceforth to keep her hands from trembling to remain more alert and to make her machine produce more.

Soon after she went back to work a man came and handed her two ribbons. She stared unbelievably, murmured, "Al," and then it seemed that the floor came

up to meet her.

She awoke in her own bed in the dormitory and remained there. The dorm mother came to talk, told her she must rest for another day.

"Al," she breathed, dry-eyed and feverishly. "Al."

The woman explained that the ribbons were not for Al, but for her father who had died somewhere out near Pluto.

She rolled over on her face, but couldn't cry. There were no tears left in her.

A doctor came and gave her an injection and the following day she went back to work.

She got word indirectly that Al was back. A girl told her that she had heard it from one of the boys from the Center. "They carried him out of the ship," she said.

Sue refused to believe it. She set her jaw firmly and determined to wait. Late in the afternoon a man with a groundcar came and told her she was wanted at Recovery Seven Oh Six.

She still couldn't believe it, but went with him calmly.

They told her at Recovery that Al would someday walk again and that they would give him a new left arm, if not of flesh, then mechanical. His lungs had been crushed by pressure, but such was the fire of life in him that he would live and maybe fight again.

SHE went forty-eight hours without sleep in order to be with him all of the time she wasn't working. On the third day his lone good arm came round her and drew her down on the bed, and she slept on his shoulder.

From time to time she overheard nurses and doctors talking. The talk was usually about a subject that would always stir a woman.

"If no babies are born," one said, "for fifty years—"

"That's the length of time it's calculated to work," a doctor explained. "It's devilship. We've prepared surprises for them, but they've given us the worst. It doesn't kill the sperm, it paralyzes it or puts it in a sort of suspended state. Think of it! A boy two years old now will be unfertile until he's about fifty-two. Then, if he's healthy, the sperm will revive. Our studies indicate he will be perfectly able to become a father. But by that time hardly a woman on Earth will be able to produce the ovum. Some rare cases, but mankind will vanish anyway."

"The women are fertile now?"

"Yes. And will be until they reach the menopause. But all of them will have passed it before men become fertile again."

"Isn't there some way to delay the menopause?"

"Everything will be tried, of

course. But the cellular breakdown and many other factors have to be taken into account. It's well-nigh hopeless. But somebody might eventually hit on something to revive the sperm earlier, though it's likely the Zeehites made certain it can't be done."

Sue asked the doctor if Alfred was suffering. He shook his head. "No pain whatever. We've taken care of that. And he'll soon be up. Has a fierce determination to live, and, looking at you, I understand why."

She asked other questions. His replies were abrupt and reflected his exhaustion and preoccupation with matters of broader import.

Commuting between the factory and Recovery was time-consuming and tiring and she was forbidden to visit Al more than once a week. She told him about it. Strangely, he made no protest, begged her to get every moment of rest she could.

She asked for audience with the Council. Days passed and no word came. She tried again, and when they received her she understood the delay. They were hardly able to keep themselves awake.

"Babies," one mumbled. "Everybody has some answer to the problem. Worthless. But say what you have to say and if it has any merit we'll pass it to the Upper Council."

"I don't have the answer to babies," she said, "but I think I understand why people die."

They showed interest.

"They get tired," she said. "That's all. They just get tired. That's what breaks down the cells and makes them die."

They looked at one another, back at her. "We know all of you girls are exhausted. It can't be helped. We have to work on. We need time. Just a little while longer."

She tried again, explaining over and over, trying to make them understand why people die, and why they might remain young longer if things were different. They shook their heads. Finally she flared, "Send it on to the Upper Council as I've explained it."

That brought an inkling of a smile. "That's the spirit," they agreed. "We can never lose while we have that spirit."

They agreed to send her idea, however worthless, up the line.

EARLY in the fall Alfred was up and able to come to the factory dining hall. He hadn't got his new arm yet, but his leg worked fine and he seemed to have no trouble at all with his breathing. His hair was iron gray, but he was still handsome, his features unwrinkled. He wore two ribbons, was shown deference by high ranking officers,

and at times went away on mysterious errands.

Three men came while he was away and handed her a paper. It read merely: "Presence required at Nether Polaris."

She asked questions, but the men shook their heads, seemed impatient, urged her to hurry.

She went with them in a ground-car to a blackened plain. Memories rushed back and brought terror, but they paid no attention, led her to an atmosphere craft. They flew high above the clouds for hours, and when they came down and broke into the clear she could see nothing but endless reaches of gleaming white. The positions of the stars told her she was somewhere near the North Pole.

The craft landed near a dome which gleamed like the remainder of the expanse. They bundled her in thick heavy furs, hurried her across the snow to the dome, then removed the wraps.

It was like summer inside the dome, and she went with the men to a shaft and got into a car which carried them miles down through the frozen ocean and into the earth. When the car stopped and they came out she held her breath. The place looked like a beautiful painting of a sparkling city that had never known war.

The final surprise sent tremors through her. They told her she

was going before the Supreme Council.

In a large plastic hall she stood before the twelve and an array of advisers. Not a one looked more than forty, but the hair of most was white and in their eyes was that look that told her they had been out in the void.

"Wilson Wildress Rover Alfred?" a man inquired.

Sue admitted that was her name.

"An idea you have suggested may be of great value. We have brought you here to discuss it further."

She was dumbfounded.

"It seems that you may have found an answer to cellular breakdown which brings on age. Will you give us your impression of why men die?"

She groped for words. "They just grow tired," she said. "I asked the doctor at Recovery why men die. He said that medical science had not found the answer. He said that the body was able to reproduce every cell of itself and did that many times during one lifetime. But eventually men grow tired and die."

"And what was it that you concluded made them tired?"

"Gravity," Sue said simply. "That constant pull we fight against. It—"

"Wait!"

There were hurried movements.

A comfortable couch was pushed forward.

"Will you please relax, Mrs. Wilson? We have your complete record. We know exactly how you've worked."

Sue shook her head. "I'll still be tired, no matter how much I relax. Gravity still goes on, pulling us down. One day I'll die, not because I'm old, but because I'm tired."

"One of you gentlemen please place another pillow behind her," said a Councilman. "Now, Mrs. Wilson, we are going to place this matter in the hands of our scientists. We want you to remain here."

"But I have to go back. I'm needed in the factory."

"They'll make out, Mrs. Wilson."

"But I know those machines, just as our men know their ships. I can make them produce. I'm valuable in the factory."

"You are indeed, but we have another task for you."

"But Alfred? He'll—"

"Your husband is waiting for you in a ship which is almost ready to go out."

"Out? But Alfred? He mustn't ever fight again. You can't make him do that. Send me instead. I promised him, but—send me in his place."

"We are sending you both, Mrs.

Wilson. And I think it is proper to assure you that the tide has turned."

"Oh!"

"Just a little more time. Just a little more work."

"Oh!"

"For nearly two years the balance of strength has been swinging in our favor. We have purposely let ships through in the later years, but those that got inside the orbit of Uranus never got out again. The attrition has at last given us overwhelming strength, for we have produced."

The man paused. Sue sat numb.

Another spoke: "We have been building up a Fifth Sector, part of it on Earth and part near Polaris. It has been the best kept secret of the age. But the Earthside part of it has been in action. It can no longer remain a secret. We are going to strike. We are going to lure the enemy in close and then envelope him. It will be much like the big strike which occurred nearly two years ago. But this time we will crush him. We have finally produced the new weapons."

"Oh!"

"And now, if you are ready, the men will take you to the ship."

SUE moved in a daze. Somewhere up the shaft toward the surface they changed to a car that ran horizontally on a rail. They

came out, miles away, in a huge dome in the center of which was a converted warship.

In the ship she found Albert. He had his new arm and held her close for a long moment.

"I know the machines in the factories," she said. "I've lived with them most of my life, but I won't know how to operate the weapons. You'll have to show me."

"Huh?"

"You'll have to show me how to fight, Al. I've thought about it, but I just can't understand it."

"Fight? Sue the fighting is almost over. I couldn't tell you. It's been a secret. The last battle is in the making now. You can't even dream of the forces we've assembled. They can jolt planets out of their orbits, burst suns. This is the beginning of the future I've wanted to tell you about."

"I'll do my best, Al. I'll try—"

"Sue, look at me. You're not going to fight. Neither am I. This ship is going into an orbit about the planet."

"The lower ring, the last one before the ground defenses?"

"No, Sue. Open your mind just a moment and let me see inside you."

"Hold me."

Finally he understood and explained: "This ship is to go into an orbit to nullify gravity. Science

doesn't have to depend on trial and error. They can calculate a thing mathematically and predict the results. They worked out your idea that gravity is what breaks down the cells. The answer is that the body will not age so long as it replaces its cells and gets rid of its old ones. To free the body of gravity will slow down the cellular breakdown. In ten years you won't age as much as you would in one in a field of gravity. Is it clear?"

"Will that postpone the change of life?"

"Medical science is certain that it will. It devolves upon aging."

"Does that mean that I'll —"

"It does, Sue. It means that about fifty years from now when the sperm revives in men, you women will have children again."

"But Al, we'll be—"

"No, Sue. We'll feel and look about as we ordinarily would in our twenties. And thousands, millions of ships, will soon be released to be converted. A whole populace will live in ships—at least until children begin being born."

"Will we—"

"Yes, Sue. We'll have a few ounces of weight in the orbit. Our cells will more than replace themselves. We'll adjust to it, carry along hydroponic plants and everything we need. We'll be strong and vigorous, with nothing much

to do but study, work out new things in the arts and sciences, and—"

"And what, Al?"

"Make love."

"Oh!" she said. "Deep inside me I've always believed in that

bright future. I was trying to remember that each tomorrow would bring it closer."

"The big job is almost done, Sue. Let's keep on remembering tomorrow."

"Hold me close, Al."

THE END

INTRODUCING The Author

★ *Hal Annas* ★

(Concluded from Page 2)

the millrace, bringing ducks and fish, and pouring into the buckets of the waterwheel. The wheel would creak and groan and strain and labor and begin to turn. The wheels inside the mill would go faster and faster, the grinding stones would begin to sing, the millhouse would shake, the ducks would quack, the fish leap.

The corn would be crushed by the whirling stones and the meal would come out and go through the sifter, separating the husk. The miller would then take his share, as toll for the grinding, up to the house on the hill where his wife would make part of it into cornbread and where he would make the remainder into a mash that would later become a nourishing liquid. Thus he lived off the

fat of the land, always with plenty to eat—and drink.

This Golden Age was in some dim past—the first year of my life! The remainder can be summarized briefly.

It is customary to list schools attended. I never was very ignorant and didn't need to go to school. I did go five years, though, and became marble champion.

We were told then that boys that got educated would become president. It was a responsibility I didn't want. I quit and went to work. I've been working at one thing and another since, mostly news reporting.

That ought to be alibi enough for just about anything.

—Hal Annas

★ Power Source! ★

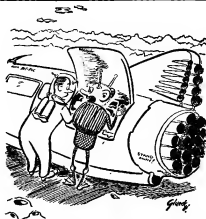
IN the next half-century, atomic energy is going to deliver many dividends, but none will be more important than these two: a portable, packaged power plant, and a portable electrical energy storage device. Off-hand they may not sound startling, but in reality they are extremely important for they will enable the ordinary, small, light, efficient, easy-to-use, trouble-free, powerful electric motor to be used wherever clumsier machines like gas and Diesel engines are used today!

Physicists have strong reasons for believing that both these devices will be invented in the not-distant future. The portable atomic power plant is perhaps too much

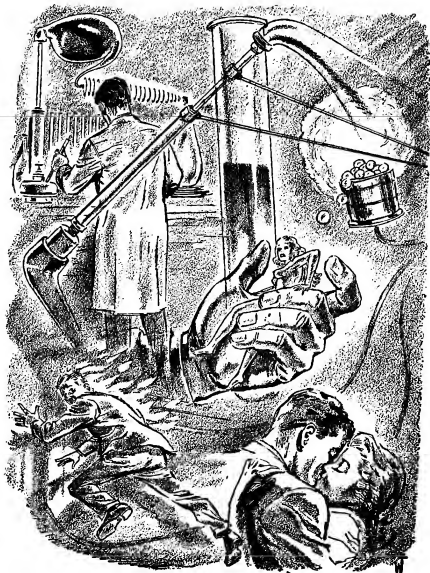
to hope for soon. But the electrical storage plant is not. This is the important gadget.

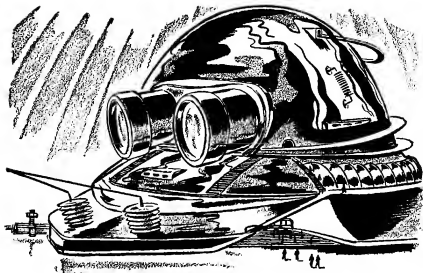
Scientists see it as a simple box no bigger than a storage battery perhaps. Plug it into an ordinary electric light outlet and let it soak up a couple of hundred kilowatt-hours of energy. What a perfect power source it would make for cars, planes, helicopters and any other kinds of portable machinery. No complications, no elaborate gearing — just plain neat electric motors!

This is a dream—now. But it won't be forever. The invention of such a power storage device will make all existing forms of ordinary engines obsolete at a stroke.



"All it needs is a new set of plugs — of course, we're quite a ways from Detroit!"





THE CYBERENE

By

Rog Phillips

Somewhere in the far future a diabolical brain plotted the enslavement of mankind. But to do that a history had to be changed — ours!

“VICTOR!”
Her voice shattered the cathedral silence, going the full four hundred and fifty foot perimeter of the fourteen foot wide floor that encircled the case of the

Brain. The echo rebounded from the maze of ladders and catwalks that went up and up until they were lost to view where the fifteen foot thick outer wall began its upward slope to form the giant dome.

The silence returned; as motionless as the needles on the instrument panels resting on their zero pegs, unactivated; as enduring in essence as the atom proof concrete dome built to last—as long as the Earth itself.

Then—a sound answered. A faint sound. Footsteps. Movement appeared through the grillwork of steel catwalks above. Trousered legs. A hand sliding along a railing of chrome pipe. More rapid steps as the man descended a steep stair well. Sharper as the man reached the marble floor.

Dead video camera eyes let his passage go unregistered. Sensitive quartz crystals inside glistening microphone shells vibrated to the sound of his footsteps, his soft breathing, sending feeble currents along wires—to dead amplifying circuits.

"What is it, Ethel?" Dr. Victor Glassman said to his wife.

"Don't you realize it's almost an hour past your lunch time?" she chided. "Why do you come in here anyway? The Brain was completed six months ago. It won't run away—and it won't come to life until someone finds the proper chemical for the nerve fluid to make it work. My goodness. Eight hundred and fifty million dollars sitting idle in here. It gives me gooseflesh. Now you come

and eat your lunch so I can get the dishes out of the way. I'm going to be busy the rest of the afternoon getting ready for the crowd—or did you forget that your ten scientists are invited to dinner this evening?"

"Of course not, Ethel," he said, putting his arm around her waist. He pulled her around so they were side by side, looking upward into the maze of catwalks, seeing the marble panels of the wall that served as a covering for the huge man-made brain. "*You* know why I come in here," he said. "I like the feel. The sleeping giant. Not sleeping, really. Just not born yet. Not living yet. Someday soon that will change. The first non-human"

"I understand, Victor," Ethel said softly. "It scares me. I know it will be just like a human mind—same principles of thought—even if it will be housed in so vast a brain. But how much do we know of the capabilities of the *human* brain? I'm afraid."

Dr. Glassman's eyes crinkled goodnaturedly. He tightened his arm around her waist.

"I'll protect you, Ethel," he said.

She looked up at the giant structure that dwarfed them to insignificance. "Against that?" she snorted. "What with? A lance and prancing nag of leather and bones like Don Quixote of old?"

She slipped her arm around his shoulders, her expression softening. "But I know what you mean. Only . . . it's . . ."

"And I know what you mean, too. Sometimes even I'm afraid of it. But once we activate it, it will take years for it to build up a self-integrated mind even equal to a child's. And we'll both be long dead before its intelligence starts climbing above that of man. You know, I'm hungry."

Together, arm in arm, they departed, closing the door. And once again the echoes died away, leaving only the silence.

And the Brain.

"**H**OW about being quiet for a minute so I won't get these mixed up?" Earl Frye said, a mask of tolerant good nature concealing his irritation. "By the way, what's wrong with p. n. 9? Bottleneck?"

Irene Conner clapped her hand over her mouth and spoke from between her fingers. "Go ahead and pour," she mumbled. "I'll keep quiet for five minutes."

"Okay," Earl said, unaffected by the twinkle in Irene's clear blue eyes, the smooth wave of her blonde hair, the quiet unscientific curves under her lab apron.

He picked the first vial off the tray, read the number on its label and carefully jotted it down on

the lab card. He emptied the vial into the small opening on top the pump and flicked the toggle switch. With a smooth whir the pump started. The pressure gauge needle broke from zero and started upward, finally hovering near the seven ton per square inch mark. He watched as the fluid he had poured emerged into glass tubing no thicker than a human hair, and, under the tons per square inch pressure, stretched into fine fluid columns less than half a dozen molecules thick.

He repeated the performance with another vial and another pump, and another, until all ten pumps were working. He went back to the first one. The fluid had reached the slightly enlarged bubble several inches up the thread-like glass tubes. He shut off the pump, then went through the same routine with the other ten.

"That show I want to see is on at the Rialto, Earl," Irene said. "Just tonight and tomorrow night."

"Good," Earl grunted, starting to recheck the charts. "Let me know if you liked it. If it's any good I might go see it."

"Why don't you come see it with me?" Irene said.

"Uh. . . ." Earl hesitated, not looking up from a chart he was studying.

He was saved by the hall door opening.

"Hi, Basil," he said, taking in Basil Nelson's expression of mild haste, and the empty test tube in his hand.

Irene frowned in annoyance.

Basil looked at her with a mixture of apology and hopefulness, then turned to Earl. "Uh, I came in to borrow some base formula," he said. "Just need a few cc's and didn't want to take the time to get a full gallon from the storeroom."

"Help yourself," Earl said. He grinned sidewise at Irene. "By the way, Irene is looking for someone to go with her to see some show that's on at the Rialto."

"I'll be glad to," Basil said eagerly.

"No thanks," Irene said. "I'm going with my aunt."

"Your aunt?" Basil said. "I didn't know you had an aunt living in Crestmont." He went to a supply shelf over a wall bench and poured some base formula from a rubber tube dangling from a large bottle.

"She just arrived in town," Irene said dryly.

"Can I meet her?" Basil said coming back from the supply shelf. He was facing Irene and half facing Earl. He was in a position so that there was nothing between him and the window across the room.

"Sorry," Irene said. "She's leaving town in the morning. I'm

sure — Oh, how can you be so clumsy, Basil?"

THE test tube had dropped from his hand. Small glass fragments and the oily fluid were spattered on the floor and his shoes. He was examining a small cut on the inside of his thumb that was beginning to bleed.

"Clumsy?" he said absently. "Oh no. I didn't drop the test tube. It broke in my hand."

"It couldn't have," Irene said accusingly. "You dropped it."

"What's the difference?" Earl said. "Here. I'll get you another test tube with some base fluid. No harm done."

He opened a drawer and took out a new test tube. When he was closing the drawer he glanced absently toward the window. His eyes widened. "What the devil!" he exclaimed. "Look at that. The window's broken too."

"That's odd—too strange a coincidence," Basil frowned.

"Supersonic vibrations?" Earl said, smiling. "Maybe a foreign spy has heard of Project Synthetic Nerve Fluid and was trying to kill Basil with a new secret weapon!"

"Ha ha," Basil said without humor. He accepted the test tube of base formula from Earl. "Thanks, Earl," he said. He went to the door. There he turned appealingly to Irene. "I would like to take

you—and your aunt—to the show, Irene,” he said.

“Sorry,” Irene said, smiling at him sympathetically. “We’ll have too much we want to talk about.”

“Uh—okay,” Basil said unhappily.

“He’s such a jerk,” Irene said when Basil had left. “All he would do is fawn over me all evening. I’d—I’d rather go alone,” she added, looking at Earl appealingly.

“Sure,” Earl said. “Be sure and let me know how you like the show. Now—” He smiled half jokingly to take the sting from his words. “Scram. I’ve got work to do.”

Irene made a face at him and went to the door.

When she was gone, Earl sighed wearily. Then he frowned at the broken window.

Carefully he stood where Basil had been standing when the test tube broke. He held his hand in approximately the same position that Basil had held it. Trying not to move his hand, he stooped and squinted over his hand toward the broken window, and beyond it.

A hundred yards away, outside the room, a small hill rose above the wall surrounding the research building. Earl fixed a spot and then went to the window to examine it more closely.

Uneasily he stood so that he was

half concealed by the wall of the room. He studied the hill for a minute.

He went to a door at the far side of his lab, and went through into a large room where he had his living quarters. He took some keys from his pocket as he approached a desk. He unlocked the top right hand drawer and took out a small blunt automatic. He checked it and put it in his hip pocket. He slipped off his lab apron and put on a suit coat.

A few minutes later he was approaching the spot he had picked out on the side of the hill. There were trees and shrubs that hid the ground. He watched worriedly, the automatic in his hand now. But there seemed nothing to be alarmed about. Nothing could be more peaceful than the wooded hillside. And yet whatever had caused the simultaneous breaking of the window pane and the test tube could not have been caused by natural means.

Something, directly ahead, concealed by shrubs, had caused it. What? He intended to find out.

He circled to the left, walking cautiously. With his left hand he parted branches to see into a thicket.

Almost at once he saw the strange structure. It was shaped like a puffball, three feet in diameter at its thickest part, and almost

as high. Its surface was of something that had an oily blue sheen. Its base seemed partly buried in the soil, and the ground was freshly damaged as though the ball-like shape had landed with great force.

To add to the evidence that it had fallen from great height, the side was split open, and dozens of small semi-transparent balls of different colors were spilled out onto the grass and weeds.

He pushed aside the bushes and approached, slowly putting the automatic back in his hip pocket. He stooped and picked up one of the small colored balls. It was a semi-transparent green.

He put the small ball in his coat pocket. He stooped and examined the break in the wall of the structure. The break faced toward the windows of his lab. He looked in that direction, and saw that leaves obscuring his view were shredded as though by a violent wind.

He found a fragment of the broken wall of the structure, a piece that was hardly more than a sliver. He put that in his shirt pocket. Then, with sudden decision, he scooped up dozens of the marble-like colored balls and loaded his pockets.

BACK in his lab again, he emptied the balls from his pockets into two measuring flasks

on a bench. They were strangely light, and one or two had to be put back in the flasks again after they floated slowly upward and down to the table surface where they rested without bouncing.

Earl was filled with excitement and eagerness. This was something entirely outside his experience, something with mystery. It occurred to him that the strange structure might be a new type bomb. Certainly all the evidence indicated it had dropped from a great height. He dismissed the possible danger with a shrug. He considered the possibility of it being some form of puffball that had sprung up in the shaded woods. It was a remote possibility.

He took the small fragment of the shell from his shirt pocket and stepped to the bench where his microscope stood. If it was living substance it would have cellular structure.

Using the low power objective lens he examined the fragment. It showed no signs of cellular structure. Instead, it was semi-crystalline, similar to a plastic, under the low power lens.

A sharp sound behind him made him straighten and whirl around, his hand going toward the gun that was still in his hip pocket. His hand froze on the butt of the gun. He could only stare.

On the table where he had placed

the two measuring flasks with the small colored balls, there were two people. A man and a girl. They were perfectly proportioned — and no more than four inches high.

They seemed unaware of his presence. One of the measuring flasks was tipped over—the sound that had attracted his attention. The colored balls were spilled over the table surface. The miniature man was trying to catch one of the balls which seemed to float weightless like a bubble. On the miniature man's face was an expression of worried concern.

The miniature girl was sitting down as though she had half risen from where she had fallen. She too was reaching for one of the floating balls.

This much Earl saw in that first startled, incredible instant; then details began to filter into his awareness. The man was green. The girl was blue. They were entirely nude, and the color of their skin was uniform—of the same pastel softness as the colored spheres!

And the girl — Earl found his eyes drawn toward her almost to the exclusion of everything else. She was beautiful beyond anything he had ever imagined.

Her smile was calm, slightly amused, more than a little satisfied and content at some inner thought.

Without thinking, Earl shouted and leaped toward them. His hand

descended to catch them. The miniature man looked up at him, startled, then in a desperate attempt to escape leaped over the edge of the table.

The girl had no time to do more than attempt to rise before Earl's fingers closed around her, imprisoning her. He lifted her so that he could see her face more clearly. She stared at him, at first with unmasked terror, then with slowly emerging perplexity and interest.

He became acutely aware of her contours against his hand. What should he do with her? He remembered the man. He would have to catch the man too!

He looked around on the floor—and saw the man peering at him from behind a table leg.

Something would have to be done with the girl. He ran to the door of his room and slipped inside. The windows were closed. She was certainly too small to lift them and escape.

He looked around swiftly, then went to a bookcase and placed her gently on the top shelf.

"Stay there!" he warned. He left the room, closing and locking the door.

ACROSS the laboratory he saw the miniature green-skinned man leap to the window sill below the broken pane. The little man looked over his shoulder and saw

Earl. With a desperate leap he reached the jagged edge of glass still in place, and pulled himself through.

Earl rushed to the window in time to see the little man disappear in the high grass growing in the untended grounds outside the building.

Who were these two miniature people? Where had they come from? Had they come in through the broken window in an attempt to steal the colored balls? Were they—were they from that strange thing out on the side of the hill? The questions burned through Earl's excited thoughts, demanding answers that wouldn't come.

Those almost weightless balls—Earl crossed to the bench and gathered them up and locked them in a metal drawer.

Nervously, he took out a cigarette and lit it, inhaling deeply. There was the girl, but he found himself reluctant to go in and face her. And yet he had to.

He started toward the hall door, then remembered the gun in his hip pocket. He hesitated, then unlocked the drawer containing the colored balls and placed it in there, locking the drawer again.

He went to the door to his living quarters and unlocked it.

He opened the door a scant inch, took a deep breath, then pushed rapidly, jumped inside, and closed

the door at his back so the girl wouldn't have time to escape.

She wasn't blue any more. Her skin was faintly tanned, flawless. But more startling, she was not four inches high. She was, he guessed, five feet two or three. She was the same girl. There was no doubt of that. Her face was the same face, now normal sized. She was the same all over.

"Sorry!" Earl gasped. He crossed quickly to his dresser, opened the third drawer and found a pair of pajamas.

"Here!" he said, holding them out behind him. "Put these on."

He felt them taken from his hand. A moment later he heard her say, "All right." It was her voice. He listened to it as it echoed in his mind, flavored it. Actually it wasn't anything so wonderful, but it was nice. Nothing seductive or elfin—but she wasn't miniature any more, either. She sounded a little—amused!

He turned to face her.

"I'm Nadine Holmes," the girl said.

"Nadine. That's nice. Holmes . . . I'm Earl Frye, up until a few minutes ago a quiet research scientist who stays in his lab practically twenty-four hours a day. Nadine Holmes. Were you really small a few minutes ago—or did I imagine it?"

"Yes. I was small . . . So *you*

are Dr. Earl Frye . . .”

“Yes. But how can you know me?” Earl asked, surprised at her tone. A distant knocking sounded. He groaned. “That’s probably Irene,” he said. “She’ll pound the door down. You stay here and be quiet while I get rid of her. She could cause both of us a lot of trouble.”

He went to the door, slipped out, and carefully locked it. The knocking was peremptory at the lab door. “Just a minute!” he said. He unlocked the door, prepared to tell Irene she was interrupting some important work. It wasn’t Irene. “Oh, it’s you, Mrs. Glassman. I didn’t know. I was busy and didn’t want to be interrump—that is, come on in.” He opened the door invitingly, and glanced worriedly at the door to his living quarters. Had he locked it? Of course he had. He distinctly remembered locking it.

“I’m sorry I interrupted your work,” Mrs. Glassman said. “I met Irene—Dr. Connor, you know. She told me you might need some reminding about dinner — seven thirty. I do hope you’ll be there.”

“I may not have my work done,” Earl said weakly.

“Nonsense! It can wait. It will do you good to get away from the lab for an evening. If you aren’t there I’ll come and get you.”

“Okay,” Earl said hastily. “I

promise to be there—on time.”

He locked the hall door after Mrs. Glassman.

HE glanced thoughtfully at the pump bench with its ten sets of glass threads containing ten different fluids, ready for cutting and connecting to the test instruments for measurement of speed and sustainment of molecular chain action.

The theory of what he was looking for—what all ten of the scientists were looking for in their planned exploration of a few dozen thousand substances, was fairly simple. The molecule in theory had to be of a special type, of which there were many examples. It had to consist of two parts; one larger than the other, such that the smaller part could break off easily and jump to the next molecule, combining with it and freeing its counterpart on that next molecule, so that the freed part would repeat the performance on the next, and so on. In that way, the ion of the lesser molecular part, starting at one end of the chain of identical molecules, would start a chain of reactions which would end in an identical free ion at the farther end of the glass thread. In effect it would be the same as though the free ion had passed quickly through the full length of the fine tube—without any of the molecules actually hav-

ing moved at all.

Unfortunately, so far, none of the substances tried had behaved quite as they should in theory. It was impossible to get a tube fine enough for a thread one molecule thick, with the molecules lined up properly.

With some of the test substances the "nerve impulse" would go part way and then turn around and come back. With others it would just "get lost." Super-delicate instruments "followed" the impulse, telling what happened to it in fine detail.

Nerve fluid from living animals had been tested and found to behave properly even in the fine glass tubing. But it was highly unstable. If a synthetic brain capable of integrated thought processes was to be constructed, a non deteriorating nerve fluid would have to be found. One that duplicated the performance of the actual nerve threads of the human brain.

All that held back Project Brain was the proper synthetic nerve fluid! Maybe it's one of those ten, Earl thought. But he entertained that thought with every ten he tested.

But right now there was a more pressing problem. Nadine Holmes. She should have arrived on the afternoon bus—instead of appearing as a pastel blue miniature girl on a bench in his lab—and growing

to an embarrassing full five foot three of emotion disturbing nudity in a few minutes. An impossible fact, but still a fact.

Where had she come from? That was what he had been going to ask her when Ethel Glassman barged in. Dear old Mrs. Glassman.

EARL went to the door to his living quarters and unlocked it. Slipping in quickly, he locked the door again. Nadine was curled up in a chair, one of his technical books on her lap, looking altogether too domestic for Earl's peace of mind. She had paused in her reading, and was looking up at him questioningly.

"Now then," Earl said. He groped for a sequence of thought. She was beautiful. "Now then," he repeated. "We've got to get you some decent clothes and decide what to do with you. What sizes do you wear?"

"I don't know," Nadine said. "I've never worn clothes before. I don't think I like them."

"You'll get used to them," Earl said hastily. "Those things you have on are my pajamas. We'll need some nylon stockings, shoes, and other things. I'll have to go buy them."

"Do you have other clothes like the ones you are wearing?" Nadine asked. "Why wouldn't they do? They're too large, but I could wear

them."

Earl stared at her in amazement. And now the big question came again. He moved closer to her. "Where do you come from?"

She puzzled over his words. "I'm not sure what you're talking about," she said, a tone of wariness in her voice. "Where I come from—perhaps we'd better not discuss that now. I don't quite understand what happened. Things didn't happen as they were supposed to. Could you take me where you first found me?"

"Not until I get you some clothes. Imagine what people would think if you walked out of here wearing my pajamas!"

"What would they think?" Nadine said, frankly puzzled. "Why are clothes? Are they connected in some way with religion? I think that's the word for it—religion. Do clothes bring you good luck? Is that it? You seem so—so intense about it. Does everyone wear them?"

He ignored her question, went out, locking the door. Before he opened the lab door to the hall he glanced at his watch. An hour ago nothing had happened! He shook his head, opened the door and stepped into the hall—almost bumping into Basil Nelson.

"Hi, Earl." Basil said. "You look like you're in a hurry."

"I am," Earl said. He started

past Basil, who fell into step beside him.

"I'll go along," Basil said. "That is, if you don't mind. I wanted to talk with you. Pretty important. It's about Irene."

"What about Irene?" Earl said.

Basil waited until they were on the sidewalk before answering. "I guess it's pretty obvious I'm in love with her," he said. "But—she seems to have eyes only for you. Mrs. Glassman sort of hinted that you and Irene—well—were going to get married. I wanted to ask you. If you and Irene are—"

"Damn Ethel Glassman," Earl said, irritated. "If you are in love with her why don't you tell her?"

"She won't give me the chance to tell her," Basil groaned. "I think she suspects, though," he added darkly.

"Fine," Earl said. "And there's no time like the present. Why don't you go back and pop the question right now while you have your nerve up?"

Basil sighed. "I'll have to work up to it. Right now I'd rather tag along with you. Mind?"

"No," Earl groaned. "Not at all. A—cousin of mine has a birthday coming up. I thought I'd buy her some new clothes. No use you tagging along."

"Don't mind at all," Basil said. "We can do some more talking. Maybe we could cook up some

scheme to make Irene fall in love with me. But every time I think I'm going great with her I pull something like dropping that test tube in your lab."

"Oh, that," Earl said. "I—" He clamped his lips shut.

"**S**EE you at Glassman's at dinner tonight," Earl said firmly an hour later. As Basil still hesitated, he added, "Maybe I can think of something by then. Meanwhile I've still got work to do."

"Uh, oh sure," Basil said, "but I'm afraid it's no use. She's in love with you, Earl."

"Nonsense!" Earl unlocked the door to his lab and went in with his packages. He stacked them on a lab table and locked the hall door. A quick survey showed the lab as it should be. Earl had been worried. Since Nadine had become a full sized person, maybe the little green man had too.

Earl crossed to the door to his living quarters and unlocked it. Inside, he saw Nadine still curled up in the chair in his pajamas, a stack of books beside her.

"Hi," Earl said, subdued. "I've brought you some clothes, and also some literature on what they are. I think the literature will give you enough data to work on in dressing."

He brought the stack of packages into the room and put them

on a table.

"While you're dressing I'll finish some work out in the lab," he said.

"Clothes seem terribly important to you," Nadine said without moving from her comfortable position. "I still can't understand why. I've tried and tried." She picked up a book. "This book, for example. It's a very vivid account of a murder. I can understand vaguely about the murder. It seems to be some sort of game that people play. There are official players who earn their living at it. The taxpayers pay them for it, and they sit in their offices until some taxpayer wants to play with them. The taxpayer kills someone. The detectives must find out who he is if they can. I can understand that. But there are whole passages where everyone seems to forget the game while they pay great attention to what someone is wearing. That's it! It must be another game. No?"

Earl grinned. "That's pretty close," he said. "Do you have games where you come from?"

"No. Games aren't functional."

"Oh," Earl said vaguely. "Well, get those clothes on, Nadine. You will look terrific in them."

He backed out of the room and closed the door. While he worked he wondered how Nadine could speak English without an accent. It was too far-fetched to think it

her native language. Even if it were, spoken language changes so rapidly that the only possible explanations were, (1) she was from some part of the United States, or (2), her people were in constant radio contact with current broadcasts. But neither alternative could account for her inability to grasp the purpose of clothes. He hadn't had quite enough nerve to mention to her the main purpose—sex. Maybe she had been too shy to mention it too. But that didn't seem to jibe with her evident willingness to take off her clothes. And she hadn't answered his question on where she came from.

WHILE Earl thought these thoughts he let his hands and one part of his mind put the synthetic nerve filaments in place in the instrument banks. There wouldn't be time to run the tests, but he could do that in the morning when he was alone.

Alone. The thought struck him with dismaying force. He realized suddenly that he had been trying to keep Nadine with him as long as possible—and that was futile.

Was he in love with her? He faced the question squarely and felt his stomach turn over and his heart start to pound wildly. He tried to tell himself it was just the unusualness of the situation.

He was jerked out of his

thoughts by the sound of high heeled shoes. Nadine had opened the door and taken a few steps into the lab. His eyes approved of what they saw.

"They're very uncomfortable," Nadine said. "Especially the shoes. But I looked at myself in the mirror—and I think I begin to understand, a little. Clothes are adornments."

"On you they are," Earl said. "I never before realized . . ."

"What's a kiss?" Nadine said.

Earl blinked. He cleared his throat loudly and said, "One thing at a time, Nadine. There's lots for you to learn. In the meantime, how does it happen you know English so well? If you're from—some other planet—you certainly don't speak it as your native language."

"It was taught to us for the expedition," Nadine said. "I think there must have been an accident. Can you tell me anything about it? The first I remember is just before you picked me up in your enormous hand."

Earl told her everything he knew. She listened, nodding her head at times.

"I think I understand now," she said when he finished. "The stasis spheres. Somehow mine and George Ladd's were fractured, so that we emerged on the bench. He was in the green one."

"You mean you were *in* one of those marbles?" Earl exclaimed.

"Where is the ship?" Nadine said.

Earl took her to the window and pointed out the spot. "You can't see it from here," he said. "But I have some of the—what did you call them? Stasis spheres? I'll show you."

He unlocked the drawer. Nadine leaned over, seeming to look inside of each translucent marble.

"Yes," she said, straightening. "It's gone wrong, somehow. The Cyberene will be most annoyed."

"The Cyberene? What's that?"

Nadine stared down into the drawer, frowning. "You wouldn't understand," she said. And then, "I'm hungry."

Earl frowned. "That reminds me. I have to go to dinner at Dr. Glassman's in a little while, or Mrs. Glassman will come barging in here. I'll fix you something first. After I get back I'll take you to a hotel."

Nadine perched on the edge of the table in his kitchenette while he opened some cans and heated their contents.

"How does it smell?" Earl asked after a while. "Good?"

"Strange," Nadine said. "Not entirely strange. Some of the smells are familiar."

"Would you like a cocktail?" Earl said. He didn't wait for her

answer. He was acutely conscious of playing the host. "This is my favorite drink. A dash of rum, a little vodka, lime juice, powdered sugar, ice cubes and selzer. There." He handed her one of the two glasses. "How do you like it?"

Nadine sipped the drink cautiously. "Good," she said. "I was thirsty too."

"What is the Cyberene?" Earl said, dishing steaming food into a plate set precariously on the edge of the stove.

"The—the Cyberene." Nadine said as though that explained it. "How do you eat that food without getting dirty? And there's such an enormous amount of it. I'm used to capsules, with lots of water to help digest them."

"Oh. Dehydrated foods," Earl said. "Damn! I wish I didn't have to go to that dinner. Stay in here while I change my clothes."

"Earl," Nadine said as he was about to leave the room.

"Yes?" he said, turning to look at her questioningly.

"What does damn mean? I can't get the sense of it."

"It's an adornment of speech," he said. "Like clothes."

WITH dinner over, Earl drifted toward the door after excusing himself and thanking the Glassmans. Basil followed him.

"I need someone to talk to—to

help me, Basil," Earl said as they walked back toward the lab building. "Remember that test tube breaking? And the window pane?"

"How can I forget?" Basil said ruefully.

Quickly Earl outlined everything that had happened.

"What you should have done," Basil said in amazement, "is gone directly to Dr. Glassman with it. Now nobody will believe you. Even I find it hard to believe. You must have fallen hard, the way you want to keep her under lock and key."

"It's not that," Earl said. "Just a lot of little things. Like her repeating my name as if she knew all about me. And her refusing to say where she's from. And her knowledge of our language yet knowing absolutely nothing about our social customs."

"What about time travel?" Basil said.

"Time travel? That's absurd." "Why?"

"If time travel were possible at any future date, we would have time travelers all around us. They'd come back."

"Maybe they have," Basil said darkly. "What did she call those colored marbles you found? Stasis spheres? But the main thing right now is that if I were in this George Ladd's shoes—"

"He doesn't wear shoes."

"Well, I would be trying to res-

cue Nadine Holmes this very minute. It's dark now—"

But Earl wasn't listening. Basil hurried to catch up with him as he walked rapidly, until they reached the lab building resting against the giant starless bulk of the dome that housed the Brain.

"Be quiet," Earl warned as they stole down the hall toward the door to his lab.

They reached the door and stopped. Through the panel came the sound of a male voice, the words indistinguishable but the tones unmistakably demanding and insistent.

Nadine's voice answered, its tones firm. Earl and Basil looked at each other. Neither of those inside were speaking English.

The male voice uttered a harsh monosyllable. Nadine screamed. Earl, abandoning caution, tried to open the door. It was locked. He wasted precious seconds getting the key into the lock. Cursing at the delay, he flung the door open and ran toward the two figures struggling near the windows. One was Nadine, her clothes torn, her face a mask of desperate effort to escape. The other, Earl recognized instantly as being George Ladd. He also recognized the suit Ladd was wearing. It was one of his own.

LADD didn't seem to be aware of him until he grabbed him

by the shoulder and pulled him around roughly. For a split second George Ladd was motionless with surprise—and in that split second Earl lashed out with his fist.

The blow sent Ladd stumbling backward until he brought up against a table. Earl leaped toward him. Ladd made no attempt to escape, but fumbled for something in the coat pocket of the suit he was wearing. A glistening object appeared in his hand.

Earl swerved, thinking it must be a gun. Then he was sprawling full length on the floor, his muscles refusing to obey his commands. His consciousness was almost entirely dominated by a terrible tingling sensation that seemed to possess every cell of his body from the neck down.

He had fallen in such a way that he saw Basil leaping forward. The next instant Basil was plunging floorward, his arms refusing to come up to break his fall.

Nadine was running toward the open hall door. She too fell sprawling.

George Ladd appeared in Earl's line of vision. He closed the door and locked it from the inside, then picked Nadine up and cradled her limp body over his shoulder.

Earl tried to cry out. The tingling in his throat became unbearable. In numb horror and frus-

trated rage he watched George Ladd, Nadine over his shoulder, her arms dangling limply. A moment later he heard a window raised. There were sounds of heavy exertion, a faint thud outside the window. Then silence.

Earl's eyes fed on Basil's motionless form. For what might have been minutes or hours the tingling continued. It died away with imperceptible slowness. Finally he was able to move a little. A minute later he was able to sit up. His entire body felt as though it had "been asleep."

Almost immediately Basil moved. Earl reached out for the nearest table and pulled himself to his feet, fighting to keep his legs from caving.

Basil rose to a sitting position, shook his head to clear his senses, looked up at Earl, and grinned feebly. He said, his speech thick and clumsy, "Now I believe you. That paralysis gun did it."

Earl was startled. "You didn't believe me before?"

"Hell no!" Basil sighed. "I just thought you were going a long ways to explain what some people would call a sordid affair." His grin became more natural. "I was right though. This George Ladd is now a hero." He frowned. "Only—your Nadine didn't seem to *want* to be rescued."

"Get up and move around,"

Earl said desperately. "Get some circulation back. We may still be able to catch up with them and get her back."

"I don't know," Basil said doubtfully, getting to his feet. "I hate the idea of that paralysis gun."

"I've got a gun too," Earl said.

He half stumbled toward the bench with the locked drawer. He searched for his keys, remembered he had left them in the hall door. He started for the door, then stopped. The locked drawer was open and damaged. A heavy screw-driver was on the table over it. The drawer was empty.

"He got my gun!" Earl said. "He got the stasis spheres too!"

Basil came to stand beside him and stare broodingly into the empty drawer. "That does it," he mumbled. "Now you don't have anything."

"There's that thing out on the hill," Earl said. "Maybe George Ladd headed for that. He hasn't had time to get located in town. We can find him hiding out there. Wait until I get a flashlight."

From another drawer he brought out a high-powered flashlight. He went to the open window and crawled out. Basil hesitated, then followed him.

BEHIND them was the building they had just left, light streaming from the open window and

from half a dozen other windows. To their right loomed the dark bulk of the dome that housed the gigantic Brain, an obsidian shape in the night that hulked into the heavens, blotting out a hemisphere of stars. Ahead, above the horizon, was a crescent moon that served to silhouette the hill and its horizon of trees. Around them were dark shapes, motionless.

Earl kept the flashlight ready, but didn't use it as they stole swiftly forward. Neither man spoke, but their breathing was a stentorian sound that blended with distant traffic noises and the nearby chirping of a cricket, and the rustling of weeds as they forced them aside in their passage.

They reached the hill and went forward more slowly, using caution as they remembered the effects of the paralysis gun. Now Earl was remembering the way he had come before, finding landmarks in the darkness. At last he stopped and touched Basil's arm to bring him to a halt.

"It's on the other side of these bushes," he whispered. "I'll use the flash."

He parted the branches. Suddenly a cone of light exploded in the darkness.

"Right there," Basil said. Then, in surprise, "It's gone!"

"Naturally," Earl said in some disgust. "It fits the pattern."

"What pattern?" Basil asked.

Earl was slow in answering. He said, "I don't know. I just felt it. Or maybe I do know. Nadine and that guy Ladd were small and got big in a hurry. What was to keep that thing from doing the same? That's part of it. The other part is just a feeling. They don't seem to want to advertise to the world that they're here. Maybe the damn thing became invisible or something. With stasis spheres and small people that get big, and paralysis guns, what's so impossible about that ship or whatever it is getting big and becoming invisible? I'll bet it's still there."

But though they passed back and forth over the entire area, with increasing boldness, they encountered nothing, visible or invisible, that was out of the ordinary.

There was a concave depression in the soil where Earl remembered the puffball shape to have been. Even fresh scars in the dirt around the depression.

For a while Earl blundered through the underbrush calling Nadine's name cautiously, without hope. Finally they were forced to give up and return to the lab building.

"We could call the police," Basil said doubtfully.

"Oh, sure," Earl said, his voice harsh. "What would we tell them? Dr. Glassman would be called in.

Next they'd call the boys in the white jackets."

"Maybe they're just the boys we need," Basil said. "Or a good stiff drink. I like the idea of the drink."

IT was ten o'clock in the morning when Irene Conner pushed open the door without knocking and strolled casually into Earl's laboratory. She saw him at the far end of the room, hunched over with his elbows on the window sill, his back to her.

"Hi, Earl," she called cheerfully. "Want to have mid-morning coffee with me?"

"No," Earl said without moving.

"You sound tired," Irene said, going over to stand beside him. "Or is it spring fever—more accurately the summer doldrums."

"Neither," he said, glancing up at her with tired eyes. "I just want to be left alone. I'm thinking." He straightened up with a deep sigh. "Why don't you get Basil to have coffee with you?"

"That jerk?" Irene said. "He gets in my hair."

"Like you get in mine?" Earl said.

"That was cruel."

"Sorry," Earl relented. "I didn't get much sleep last night. I've got problems. I'd much rather be left alone with them right now."

Irene inspected him critically as a man might inspect his automobile. "Your eyes are bloodshot," she said. "Why not have some coffee with me and tell me your problems. Maybe I can help you."

"Nobody can help me—least of all you."

The phone on the desk in the corner rang. Earl went to answer it.

"This is Glassman," the phone said. "I want a general staff meeting in my office at once. Tell Dr. Conner she must be there too."

"Okay," Earl said. He hung up and looked at Irene. "Goat face," he explained. "General staff meeting. We're to go to his office at once."

"Maybe this is it," Irene said, suddenly sober.

Earl nodded. That was the way it would come. A phone call for general staff meeting. A quiet announcement that one of the scientists had at last found the ideal nerve fluid for the brain. That's all there would be to it. The greatest achievement since—if not including—the atom bomb, and the historic moment would pass without a shout—with perhaps only a tired sigh of relief, a glance of envy at the lucky one who had found it.

"Well, let's get it over with," Earl said.

They went into the hall and

walked side by side in silence toward the back of the building where it joined the Dome. Basil joined them, for once hardly noticing Irene as he looked questioningly at Earl, who shook his head imperceptibly.

They entered Dr. Glassman's office. The director was sitting behind his desk, ignoring them, pretending to be reading some type-written papers.

Earl looked around. They were all there now, he and the other nine scientists, and Dr. Glassman. Only there was something wrong with the picture. One of them should have been beaming at the others, the light of triumph in his or her eyes. Instead, the other nine reflected his own puzzled bewilderment.

"Sit down, sit down," Dr. Glassman said, looking up at them. He waited until they were all seated about the room, then cleared his throat importantly, pushing aside the papers he had been reading. He started to say something, then became aware of their expressions. He shook his head. "The end isn't in sight yet. But we may be closer than we think. I'll introduce you in a moment to a new addition to our staff. A person who—from the reports I've seen from Washington—seems to be quite a genius at creating new type molecules, tailor-made for specific tasks.

Our new associate won't be assigned a separate lab. Instead, will serve as a sort of general consultant, observing all your work, and will make suggestions for hastening things up a bit." A murmur of voices and sharp footsteps came from the hall. "My wife has been showing our new colleague the Brain. I think they're coming now."

The door opened. Mrs. Glassman's cheerful face appeared. "They're all here now," she said over her shoulder.

The door opened farther. Earl, and everyone else, was staring at the opening, waiting for their first glimpse of the newcomer.

Earl half rose to his feet before he stopped himself. Then he slowly sat down, his eyes wide and puzzled.

IT was Nadine. She wasn't wearing the clothes he had bought for her the day before. Instead, she was dressed in a stylishly cut business suit and low heeled slippers, a trim hat covering her hair. She had paused just inside the room, a half smile on her carefully painted lips. Her eyes surveyed each face pleasantly, passing over Earl's as though she had never seen him before.

"Come up here, my dear," Dr. Glassman said in honeyed tones. And to the others, "I want you to

meet Dr. Nadine Holmes." Then back to her, "What did you think of the Brain? Quite an imposing thing, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is," Nadine replied. "I felt quite—awed by it, sitting there where it will remain for untold centuries, waiting only for the vital fluid that will give it the ability to think."

"I'm sure it won't be untold centuries before it gets the fluid," Dr. Glassman said, chuckling heartily at his own humor. "I'll introduce you to your co-workers, Dr. Holmes. This is Dr. Paul Hardwick . . ."

Earl caught Basil's attention and shook his head warningly. He waited, then, for his turn at being introduced, his heart pounding violently, his pulse racing.

" . . . and this is Dr. Earl Frye . . . " Dr. Glassman said.

"How do you do, Dr. Frye." Nadine's hand was smooth and cool as she rested it in his. Her eyes sized him up with impersonal interest, but without a flicker of recognition.

" . . . and this is Dr. Basil Nelson . . . "

Nadine withdrew her hand gently and moved on.

"And now you may return to your work," Dr. Glassman announced. "I know the male members of the staff will be waiting for a visit from our charming new

member, but you must be patient. She will get around to all of you in the next few days."

Earl was in the hall before Glassman had finished. He wanted to think. Rapid footsteps caught up with him. "Now can we have coffee?" she asked with humorous petulance.

"No!" Earl said with more fierceness in his voice than he had intended. It had the effect of a physical blow on Irene. She fell back a step, blinking.

Basil caught up with them. "I want to talk with you, Earl," he said.

"Basil," Irene cut in, "will you have coffee with me?"

"Me?" Basil said in delight. "Sure." He linked his arm in hers. "Let's go." He looked back over his shoulder at Earl. "Thanks, Earl," he said. "I'll see you later." It was two hours later

"YOU sure it's her?" Basil said. "I'm inclined to agree with you. Of course, I saw her only for a second or two. . . . Where do you suppose she picked up those snazzy clothes? I was watching her when she was introduced to you. Boy, is she some actress!"

"I'm wondering if it was an act," Earl said frowning.

"Of course it was—had to be if she's the same girl. But she didn't

let on she knew you at all."

"That's why I wonder if it was an act. There was something strange about her. I can't quite put my finger on it—or yes I can. She's changed. Today her whole personality is different. And where did she get papers authentic enough to fool Glassman?"

"Why don't you ask her when she comes here?" Basil suggested.

Earl shook his head. "I wonder if she could be under some sort of hypnosis? No, wait. It isn't any more absurd than a paralysis gun. If she doesn't stay here tonight I'm going to follow her and see where she goes. Are you with me?"

"Uh . . ." Basil hesitated. "Depends on when she leaves the building. Irene and I have sort of a date to have dinner at the Red Barn at six o'clock."

"Go ahead," Earl said, grinning. "I'll probably have more success alone anyway. We'd get in each other's way."

"Why don't you ask Glassman where she's staying? It's probably some hotel in town."

"I'll think about it," Earl said.

When Basil left, Earl went to the window and looked toward the hill. Would Nadine go there? Was there some hiding place on the hill where she would go, to wait until tomorrow, after her "day's work" was done?

Earl nodded to himself. It had to

be. Nothing else fitted into the crazy pattern of events.

One thing he was certain of now. In spite of the accident that had broken open the "ship" when it landed out there, its coming here—or here and now—was no accident. Nor Nadine's apparent familiarity with his name the night before, or her showing up now with credentials that gave her the run of the place in an almost supervisory capacity.

And that meant that her interest was in the Brain. Hers—and who else? George Ladd, of course. How many more? If each of those stasis spheres had contained a person, there were dozens more in on it.

Then why had Nadine been sent into the open when she was certain to be recognized by him?

That was what had been bothering him from the instant she walked into Glassman's office. On the surface it was the most stupid thing that could have occurred. On the surface

Stupid. Yet somehow stupid didn't seem to fit. Maybe it had been exceedingly cunning. Maybe there was something he had missed.

Cunning it might be—or stupid. But there was something else about it that neither adjective quite fit. There was obviously organization in back of Nadine. People. A "ship". Paralysis guns and what

they implied. Therefore planning, colored by one accident. Suppose every detail of the plan had been worked out ahead of time, and was going ahead without alteration. Suppose the original plan had specified that Nadine was to be the "front", and the plan was proceeding blindly, on the behavior level of instinct in animals who repeat instinctive routines made senseless by changed environment. Or the blind function level of a machine that keeps turning out parts when the conveyor belt has stopped, until it wrecks itself

It annoyed Earl not to be able to pin his thoughts down, to bring everything into full focus.

HE went to his kitchenette and fixed a hasty lunch. All afternoon he worked, immersed in the routine of testing chemicals in batches of ten and making out report sheets on each one. And all afternoon he puzzled over what could be behind Nadine's having shown up. Not so much what might be behind her having returned to the scene, nor her not recognizing him, but *why* someone else hadn't been used.

No one dropped in. Irene's absence gave him only a sense of relief. Basil, no doubt, was staying away because of a guilt complex. Nadine — her continued absence could be because she wasn't ready

for him yet, or she truly didn't remember him and would get to him in due time, perhaps tomorrow; or maybe the Plan involved some other member of the research group. Or the destruction of the Brain? Earl shook his head at this thought. That alternative didn't fit.

And then it was four-thirty. Already Earl had reasoned out what he intended to do. Either Nadine would go into town and stay at a hotel, remain in the building as a guest of the Glassmans', or she would leave the building and make her way by some circuitous route to the spot on the hill where the "ship" had been.

Only the latter possibility interested Earl right now. He quickly slipped off his lab apron and put on a suit coat. He wished that he still had a gun, but it had been stolen with the stasis spheres. He'd have to do without it.

Leaving the building, he walked along the sidewalk until he was able to approach the hill from the other side where he wouldn't be seen from the windows.

It was ten minutes to five when he settled down to wait in the concealment of a thicket where he could command a view of the approaches from every direction, and a clear view of the slight depression in the ground where the "ship" had dropped.

There was nothing to do now

but wait—and stay awake. He was acutely aware, suddenly, of his lack of sleep the night before. A warm breeze rustled the leaves around him. A small hoptoad paused to stare up at him in unblinking fixity.

Overhead in a large Maple tree a host of sparrows paused to hold a brief political convention.

And then Nadine was coming up the slope from the side away from the lab. Her chic hat dangled carelessly in her right hand, the warm breeze mussing her hair. A too normal smart-looking woman's purse was under her arm. The breeze caught her skirt, molding her graceful legs, her slim body. She was too much the picture of a normal girl idly strolling in a park.

A great nostalgia, an almost overwhelming yearning, took possession of Earl. He wanted to rush forward, let her know he was there, waiting for her.

Instead, he remained motionless, watching her approach.

She seemed to be heading straight for him. For an instant he thought she must have seen him. But her expression held no excitement or anything but half dreamy enjoyment of her surroundings.

SCARCELY fifteen feet away she came to a stop and turned to face toward the concave depres-

sion in the ground, another fifty feet beyond her. With her free hand she reached up and patted at her hair like any normal girl would do, unconsciously.

Abruptly Earl became aware of something just beyond her. It wasn't tangible. A shimmering in the air. A slight but definite refractive quality that had not been there the moment before.

Nadine had seen it too. She walked forward a few steps.

"This is it!" Earl thought to himself. He crouched to run after her.

She took another step. She vanished, not abruptly, but as one might vanish into a bright silver but otherwise transparent fog.

In that instant Earl moved hurtling forward so that when she disappeared he was a step behind her.

Instantly the peaceful wooded scene vanished. His feet were on a smooth hard floor. Ahead of him he caught a brief glimpse of walls, of people without clothes.

Then he was falling over Nadine and trying to keep from falling on her. His arms were around her. Somehow he twisted so that when he landed she was on top, unhurt.

There was a stunned eternity when her eyes were looking into his, recognition and gladness unmasked, hope and pleading sending him some secret message, some

unspoken word trembling on her lips.

But Earl had seen George Ladd even as he fell, and the never forgotten instincts developed in him during World War III were in motion, making him continue his roll so that in the next instant he was on his feet, Nadine behind him. Ladd hadn't expected this and was caught by surprise. Earl took advantage of that brief uncertainty, stepping in and bringing a short chopping right against Ladd's jaw.

Before George Ladd reached the floor, Earl was running in great strides, his eyes darting ahead in search of a place to escape.

"Wait!" Nadine called. But he didn't pause. He couldn't trust her. George Ladd had been armed with his paralysis gun. He'd been waiting for him. This had been a trap, and Nadine had led him into it.

Ahead was a doorway. He hesitated. Should he continue on down the corridor or take the doorway? He decided on the latter. It opened into a room, unoccupied at the moment. There were windows. One of them was open. Earl didn't hesitate. Beyond the window was a wide paved street. If he could get away, mingle with crowds

No one was in sight. He sprinted along the pavement, away from the Dome which he had glimpsed over

his shoulder. It was beautiful, its basic structure adorned with granite superstructures of fine workmanship. But he didn't pause to admire it. He wanted people, lots of people, to mix with and hide from pursuit.

For a hundred yards the street went through parkways. Then ahead were buildings. He reached them, racing along a canyon formed by windowless walls of buildings. He rounded a corner. The street was still deserted.

He ran on and on, turning corners when he came to them, but always heading in one general direction so as not to circle back toward the Dome.

ABRUPTLY he paused. Beside him was a door in a building. He darted inside, closing the door behind him and leaning against it while he breathed in rasping gulps of air.

Ahead of him was a corridor and more doors. After a brief rest he sprinted down the hallway. If he could find a vacant room, a place to hide until he could map out some plan.

He listened at the first door. There was no sound. He tried the knob. The door opened silently under his touch. He stepped in. The room was unoccupied. Its far wall was of glass. He glanced through it. He was looking out

over an enormous workshop of some kind. Row upon row of small vats were there—and people.

He was seeing his first people of this world he had plunged into. They wore no clothes. They seemed to be tending the vats, walking along the aisles, pausing here and there at a vat to touch banks of controls and watch what was in each vat.

From the hall Earl had just left came loud voices. The words were in a strange language, but the tones carried their own message. His pursuers had caught up with him. In another moment they would open the door and find him.

He looked around for a way to escape. There was a trap door in the floor. It undoubtedly led to the huge workshop. Earl lifted the door and saw a ladder. He climbed onto it, letting the trap door fall back into place as he descended.

He fully expected workers to see him and react to his presence in some way. A worker was less than ten feet away. The worker didn't pause or seem to notice him.

Silently Earl watched the man's eyes, dull and void of intelligence. They seemed only passive recorders of what there was for him to see. He was touching control knobs in front of a vat.

Earl looked into the vat and caught his breath. Floating in the

tank was a human embryo. It was alive, its umbilical cord growing from a spongy mass on the floor of the tank.

Forgetting his danger, Earl grabbed the man's shoulder. "What is this?" he demanded. "Human babies growing in tanks?"

The worker waited unresisting until Earl released his grip, then continued on his routine way. He was, in every respect, a robot, doing his specialized job, his mind a complete blank to anything else. A zombie. Earl looked out over the vast baby factory and realized with numb horror that all the hundreds of people working here were the same. Walking dead, their minds capable of only one thing—doing this specialized task. And the human embryos in the tanks? Would they become walking zombies?

Over his head came the sound of the trap door opening. Earl didn't take time to look up. He ran. Down an aisle between rows of unborn humans tended by undead zombies. Up another ladder into another observation room, ignoring shouts that caught up with him. Out another door, down another hall, through another door, and into a street again.

Miles of streets, and then something recognizable. A factory with belching smokestacks. He plunged toward it recklessly, desperately

hoping to find intelligent men. Men with minds. Men able to help him hide.

He found himself inside a huge plant where giant ladles were pouring molten metal into molds. There were men running the machines that controlled the pouring. They wore thick asbestos-like suits.

As Earl ran toward them he saw one of them slip and fall so that his arm went into the stream of molten metal. The man didn't cry out nor jerk away. Splattering metal cascaded on the others. There was the stench of burned flesh.

His mind numb with the shock of what he was seeing, Earl stood rooted, watching the others continue their work with expressionless faces, blank eyes. Mindless creatures, controlled like inanimate robots.

"Earl!"

He turned in the direction of the voice. He saw Nadine beckoning for him to come to her. He started toward her, then stopped. She was different from these—or was she? No, she wasn't any different. She too was an automaton. She was beckoning him to walk into another trap.

He turned to run the other way, but in that moment of indecision he had been surrounded by men like George Ladd, carrying the little paralysis guns—and they were

automatons too.

He turned, searching for a way of escape, the smell of molten metal and cooked flesh strong in his nostrils. And then he felt the sting of the paralysis gun and was falling forward.

A sharp pain entered the base of his skull. He lost consciousness then with the monstrous horror of what was around him searing into his soul.

THE next instant, it seemed, he awakened, all the horror fresh in his mind, the stinging sensation at the nape of his neck changed to a dull throbbing pain. Nadine had led him into this. But she was like the rest, a zombie unable to think for herself.

He shook his head slowly in pained bewilderment. She hadn't been that way the first time he met her. She had been—*herself*. *What could have created this nightmare?*

A voice somewhere sounded in deep resonant tones. "So you are awake," it said.

Earl rolled onto his side and searched for the source of the voice. There was no one in view. He was in a room whose walls and ceiling were heavy glass. He looked through the ceiling and saw the familiar maze of steel catwalks inside the dome.

Outside his glass prison a pair

of video cameras were trained on him. Their lenses seemed somehow sentient, so that their motionlessness partook of the quality of a fixed stare.

"I've always wanted to meet you," the voice said, and it seemed to come from a small case atop the camera frames.

It was a dream, Earl decided. He had been hit on the head. In his delirium he had conjured up the Brain, activated and intelligent as it was designed to be in theory, possessed of a mind of its own.

"Of course," the voice went on, "I've seen film shots of you. You are the discoverer of the nerve fluid that made me possible."

Earl sat up abruptly. "Who are you? And where—"

"I am the *Cyberene*. This is the year 3042 A.D., in the old calendar. I had you brought here through what might be called a time tube from your own period. Shortly you will return through that tube to your own time — as many hours ahead from the time you left as you spend here before you go back."

Earl got to his feet slowly, watching the glistening lenses. "Now it begins to fit together," he said. "You're behind Nadine and Ladd. You say *I'm* the discoverer of the nerve fluid. You're mistaken. It hasn't been found yet

—and there are ten of us looking for it. One of the others may be the one to find it.”

“History says you found it.”

“And you just wanted to see me because of that?” Earl asked.

“Watch,” the voice said.

The plate glass wall in front of Earl changed suddenly, to become apparently a giant window overlooking a huge sprawling city. There were buildings that reached thousands of feet into the sky, with fragile looking networks of bridges spanning the spaces among them. There were giant aircraft in the sky. In the distance was a trail of fire that might be from an interplanetary rocket ship departing spaceward.

And abruptly the elfin city was blotted out by a blinding sun. Seconds later the blinding sun was gone, and Earl could see the city again. But now it was only the skeleton of what it had been. Its spiderweb design of bridges was torn and twisted. Many of its tall buildings were even now toppling toward the ground. Fire shot skyward in a pyrotechnic display of havoc.

A GIANT airplane appeared, heading straight toward the window through which Earl watched. It grew larger. For a brief second he looked into its control cabin and saw its pilot and co-pilot.

They were human, but their faces were harsh and cruel, their eyes cold and inhuman. In the next instant they were gone.

“That is a typical scene on—the other Earth,” the voice of the Cyberene explained.

The scene of the desolate city vanished. In its place appeared another scene. A city under construction. Giant building machines were placing it together, and the parts that were completed were even more beautiful than had been that other city.

Earl, from his vantage point, seemed to drop closer and drift over the scene of construction to a part that was inhabited. He saw the people below. They wore no clothes and didn't seem to mind. Each appeared to be intent on going somewhere. None of them were talking or paying any attention to one another. Their expressions were blank, their eyes vacant.

The vantage point followed one of them. Shortly the man being followed turned into an archway, up an incline, and into a large hall. He went through a door into the room filled with cell-like vats. In each transparent vat Earl saw a human embryo, alive and growing. He “followed” the man through this place to another, where children were playing with psychological toys designed to increase mechanical and scientific aptitudes.

"This, too, is a typical scene on —this Earth," the Cyberene said. The scene vanished. Once again Earl looked into the video eyes of the Brain. "They are both Earth in the year 3042," the Cyberene said, "but not the *same* Earth. In 1980 there was a split. Earth followed two independent futures. The first, filled with wars and eternal carnage, ever more perfect weapons of destruction, developed from *one* decision you made. The second, my world, filled with perpetual peace and happiness, developed from the alternative decision. *You* created these two futures."

"I?" Earl said. "You must be crazy. How?"

"In the first you discovered the vital nerve fluid that makes me possible. You thought you were God. You thought you could see a future in which I would work the human race harm. You suppressed your discovery by the simple process of giving a negative lab report on the substance. In the second world—*my* world—you did as you were supposed to do. You announced your discovery. *I* came into being."

"You mean to say *my* actions caused the whole planet to split into two identical worlds?"

"In effect, yes. I'll try to explain. Matter and motion are not real in the basic sense. They are properties of your mind. They

are what your finite mind sees; but reality is the space-time continuity of which one instant is a cross-section. In effect, consciousness flows along the time dimension which I term the fourth dimension. But in addition there is a fifth dimension, so that these two Earths have the same space-time coordinates in four dimensions, and two different ones in the fifth. In Euclidean concepts, that other Earth is eighty-seven millionths of an inch from this, in the fifth dimension. In that Earth I did not develop. The Dome is still there, but the Brain, if it still exists, was never activated. As a result, humanity continued its violent progress through time, engaging in war after war.

"When I discovered time travel and saw all this I decided to go back and contact you before your instant of decision and get you to release the identity of the nerve fluid when you discover it *tomorrow*."

"Tomorrow?" Earl said.

"In your time."

"I see," Earl said. "Tomorrow I make the discovery. In one time stream I tell Glassman. In the other I decide not to. *What made me decide not to?*"

"You *thought* the Brain would be bad for humanity. You were, of course, wrong."

"Was I?" Earl said.

"In that other world, wars are the normal state of things. They stem from problems that don't exist in my world. Over-population, competition in trade in things that aren't necessary to human economy, opposed political systems—all the foibles and inconsistencies of untrained and unorganized populations."

"I understand that," Earl said. "Why don't your people wear clothes?"

"Clothes are unnecessary—one of the things I eliminated in reducing the industrial economy to a minimum. Over-population? There is none. People are made in the laboratory as they are needed. Their lives are uncomplicated by animal problems such as reproduction, and artificial customs such as modesty. Their education is simplified and factual, their lives functional."

"And I made that decision all by myself?"

"Yes. That's why I have brought you here—to get you to change that decision. You see, I must change the past. I must do that in order to correct the future, make the other Earth a sane place, *dominated by a second Cyberene which is a counterpart of me.*"

"**T**HAT'S what I thought," Earl said with reckless boldness. "I'm beginning to under-

stand why I made my decision to suppress the identity of the nerve substance. *You* did that. The things I've seen. You're just like dictators of our time. You think you're so right that everyone will naturally agree with you. I don't. I think it's more humane to let people come into the world as they will and have wars that destroy them, than to decide just how many are to be born. You need a new man in the garbage disposal plant in twenty years? Press a button and he will be born in a few months. Going to have less to do in some factory in twenty years? Keep the zombies from being born. Less trouble than killing them off later to save on the food bill."

"I was afraid you might feel that way," the Cyberene said. "I have the answer to it. Nadine Holmes. Make an accurate report tomorrow on the tests. In return I will leave her in your time—even plant directives so that she will always be a loving and devoted wife to you."

"I would prefer her as she is, naturally."

"Today her every outward manifestation was under my direct mental control. Don't you see, Earl Frye? Just before you followed her into my neatly laid trap to get you here, you watched her come up the hill, and adored every line

of her, every mannerism, every play of expression. With one small corner of my mind I can *anticipate* your wishes and fulfill them in her—"

"It wouldn't be *her*," Earl said shaking his head. "And even if it were, at the cost of billions of unborn generations? No."

"But you will do as I wish whether *you* wish to or not. Why not obey me freely and get this reward, -rather than nothing?"

"*I can control you.*" The voice ended triumphantly.

"No!" It was a shuddering protest from Earl's lips, forcing itself out against his wishes.

The throbbing ache at the base of his brain increased abruptly, slowly, to measurable beats.

"I can control your body, your conscious mind, shoving *you* into the back recesses of thought. And when you try to come out, I can punish you—like I'm doing now."

"No!" Earl screamed, his reserve breaking down completely.

Suddenly, into his cosmos of unbearable suffering and horror, filtered a thought that created hope. Nadine had been *free* during those first hours he had met her. She had defied George Ladd. Unsuccessfully, but she had defied him. And when they had sprawled through that doorway to the future, for a moment he had seen that same *free* Nadine in her eyes. her

expression. Or had she ever been free? The terrible throbbing pain blurred his thinking. Had she been free in the smelter where she attracted his attention while the others surrounded him? If he had run directly to her he would have escaped being surrounded. But . .

Anger entered his mind like a little finger of thought. Anger at Nadine? He was surprised. Confused. Then it came to him that it was not *his* anger. It came from outside. Alien.

From the depths of his own instincts fear welled up and became blind panic, fighting against the *something* that was growing stronger, crowding around his soul, forcing it to retreat within itself, until Earl Frye, his awareness of being Earl Frye, of being himself, was all that remained, helpless to control or even to feel.

Through a mental fog he was aware that he had stood up, the glass cage had lifted, and he was free to go—but not *he*! His body was controlled by the Cyberene.

He was aware that he had left the dome to walk through a beautifully landscaped garden to a building he had not seen before but which he knew to be the 3042 end of the time tube. He was aware of pausing and looking back at the Dome, now a thing of incredible beauty to him, the repository of his physical vehicle, the

Brain. But *not his*. The Cyberene's.

HE entered the time tube. He stepped from it onto grassy ground. He went through the trees to the sidewalk. He returned to the lab building, to his lab, to his living quarters.

He encountered Basil. He listened to himself talk, in casual tones, normal tones. He was unable to control even his conscious thoughts. But his consciousness was a thing apart from him.

He fought the domination of the Cyberene with arms that would not move, with a tongue that would not utter his words, with a rage that would not alter his calm and pleasant expression. He fought the pain that throbbed within him. He fought to stay sane.

Slowly he began to adjust to his position. He no longer fought. He was like a passenger in a plane who watches it take off, fly great distances, and land, with no concern about the details. Having no control whatever over his body, he was free of responsibility toward its routine behavior. He became aware that pain had departed. The very thing he had fought began to interest him. There must be some definite mechanism—property of the mind—that made telepathic enslavement possible in this way. Undoubtedly Nadine

was also a free focus of thought behind her enslaved surface.

She came into the lab at ten o'clock, cheerful but impersonal. He heard himself talking to her in the same way. He could see her, listen to her. Therefore, behind her impersonal eyes was the Nadine he had first met, watching him, knowing what had happened. It gave him comfort to know that. He had not lost her. She was *there*.

Knowing that, and knowing there was no way to communicate with her at present, he turned his attention to what her body and his were doing.

"The silicones haven't been explored too thoroughly yet," she was saying. "They have some disadvantages, but those can be eliminated by additions to the ion rings to serve as protective buffers. I have several of them in this tray I brought in. I'd like you to run them through the tests."

Earl's eyes focused on the tray. They paused briefly on the formula of the third one from the nearest end. Earl sensed that this was the long sought for substance. He built up its theoretical structure. He saw at once how it achieved its properties.

"I'll be back this afternoon," Nadine said. "By then you should have your lab reports ready."

Then she was gone. Earl's

hands went through the motions of pouring each vial into a pump. He turned his attention away from the routine, as a traveler in a passenger plane might turn from the window to something else.

A feeling of hopelessness grew within him. How could he stop things or interfere with them when he couldn't affect a muscle?

The Cyberene had been playing with him when it tried to get him to do its bidding of his own free will. He realized that now. It would have pleased its vanity if he had.

But this was too important to it for it to trust anything other than itself.

When it was done? When the fluid was forced into the hundreds of thousands of miles of hair-like glass tubing, the billions of fine glass cells? It would never give him his freedom. It would be afraid of what he might be able to do. So it would kill him.

Unless he could prevent the Brain from being activated. And unless he were free to command his body, he could never do that.

What had the Cyberene said to him about time travel and alternate time streams? The theories weren't exactly new. They had been explored in imaginative fiction for over fifty years. No one had really thought there might be some basis in fact for the the-

ories.

What had caused the "split" which had produced two Earths in separate time streams? The Cyberene hadn't seemed to know that detail—or if it had it had brushed over it casually so as not to make him curious about it.

Was it events? Or was it something in the basic substratum of matter, and the events were the result? That might be an important distinction.

If it were events, then bringing the Brain to life in this time stream might eliminate the divergent streams, bringing them together as one. That, in effect, might destroy the other world of 3042 A.D. Maybe that was what the Cyberene intended.

But suppose he were able even yet to defeat the Cyberene's scheme. Then the two time streams would remain unchanged. The free world of the future would remain free. But that was not enough. He wanted to destroy both Brains. How could he accomplish that, assuming he were able to accomplish anything?

THE logical time to do it would be in 1980—now—before the Cyberene gained control of the world and made itself impregnable. But how? And if he could figure that out, could he act if an opportunity arose?

Irene Conner came in at lunch time. "I had a wonderful time with Basil last night," she said.

"I'm glad you did," Earl heard his voice say.

Hope leaped within him. Maybe the Cyberene would make some mistake that would arouse suspicions in her. The hope died as the door to the hall opened again and Nadine came in.

"You promised to take me to lunch, Earl," she said.

"Ready," Earl heard himself say.

It was evident that the Cyberene didn't intend him to be alone with any of the others long enough for the possibility of something suspicious to arise.

They went to a small cafe several blocks from the lab building. For the benefit of anyone happening to be looking at them, they carried on small talk while they ate. Earl found himself hanging onto every word Nadine uttered, watching her every expression. He was so close to her, yet so far away. It was like standing outside a window and watching her while she seemed unaware of him.

He kept watching for the faintest flicker of expression that would show the real Nadine. Slowly, without quite realizing it, he began to pretend it *was* Nadine. He listened to her small talk. He listened to his, and at times forgot it wasn't

actually his and that he couldn't control one word of what he said.

He became happy. He let himself be aware of the flavor of the food. He laughed within himself when his vocal cords laughed. He reached out and touched Nadine's hand, thrilling to the feel of her soft skin.

She drew her hand back, a startled light in her eyes. It was gone the next instant. Once more she was impersonal, *controlled*.

The dull, throbbing pain flared to torturing intensity within him, blurring thought, *punishing* him, forcing him behind his prison walls of gray mental fog. But through the pain, apart from it, he experienced a surge of hope. It had been *he* who had reached out to Nadine. Not the Cyberene controlling him!

Was there still hope? At two o'clock Nadine would pick up his lab report sheets and turn them over to Glassman. Then the identity of the ideal nerve fluid would be known. It would be out of his hands even if he were in full control of his faculties.

He and Nadine rose. They were going back to the lab building. He raged against the hidden mental barriers that contained him. He fought frenziedly to influence some slight movement of his body.

He might as well have been a passenger on an ocean liner trying to change the course of the thou-

sands of tons of steel by thought alone while standing at the rail.

His sphere of awareness grew clouded. He was raging against a mental wall that became almost tangible. He stopped fighting from sheer impotence—and the barrier retreated.

The more I fight the more helpless I am. That thought at once created its corollary. The less I struggle the closer I am to control!

That was it! He had so identified his desires with the actions of his body that for one instant he *meshed* with it!

That, then, was the secret. The principle. But it contained within itself its own difficulty. By "wanting" to activate the Brain he could perhaps actually control some of his actions. But the instant he did something counter to the Cyberene, that control would be taken away from him, and replaced by throbbing pain.

He *had* touched Nadine's hand though. It had been a gesture so unconscious that the Cyberene had been unaware of it until it happened.

It was the right direction

THE possibility of what he wanted to do filled him with a sense of defeat. It would be impossible to falsify the lab report on the nerve fluid. One false word on the card, and the Cyberene

would erase it and fill the card out correctly.

He fought back the feeling of futility. He reached out, identifying himself with every sensation from his body. He was walking. He *wanted* to walk. He was talking. He *wanted* to say what he heard himself say.

It would go along well, and then his body would do something he didn't expect, and he would be filled with the realization that he had no control. It would be a mental stumble while his body didn't falter.

During each brief period of identifying his desires with his actions, he found his awareness of sensations expand until it was almost complete identification — complete *meshing*.

- Meshing until the gears were almost strong enough to grip—for a brief second. Perhaps in time they would grip for more than a second before alarm bells rang for the Cyberene.

He was alone in his lab. He was placing the fine tubes of test substances in their respective instrument cabinets. Ordinarily he did this almost automatically. Now he watched his every move, building up interest in it, *desiring* to do everything he did, anticipating what he would do next and wanting to do it, pretending it was he who issued the commands to his muscles.

The crucial moment was just ahead. He had stepped to the instrument case that held the key fluid. He started to write down the readings from the instruments. His fingers shook, and it was *his* nervousness that shook them.

A "mistake" in the readings here and there would do it. Speed of ion travel: The meter said two thousand plus feet per second. His fingers wrote the two and a zero. Before he could write the second zero he tried to write the plus sign. Triumphantly he saw his fingers obey his will.

Abruptly they paused—and he was aware that a power outside his will had made them pause.

Throbbing pain surged up to full intensity, enveloping him, sickening him so that his soul was a writhing thing, unable to think or feel anything other than pain. Slowly it lessened—or was he growing better able to suffer it? Thoughts filtered in to him through gray mists clouding his mind.

He saw his hands fill out the rest of the card correctly. He was dimly aware of rushing excitedly from the lab, down the hall, shouting that he had found it.

Others were joining him as he hurried to Glassman's office and burst in, waving the card.

Glassman seized it, his eyes afire with the fulfillment of his Dream.

And it was too late. Too late

now to erase the knowledge of the identity of that fluid from Glassman's mind, from the minds of the other nine scientists crowding around him, congratulating him.

It was too late.

That realization crowded out everything else. The Cyberene had won.

“WE want to put it through every test conceivable,” Glassman said. “All ten of you drop everything else and work on it. Get the speed of impulse down to the last fraction of an inch per second. Get behavior in different sized tubes. Find the least diameter of the fluid column for non-function. Everything. We want to be *sure* before we start pumping two hundred and fifty thousand gallons of the stuff into the Brain.”

Dr. Glassman's eyes were afire with the triumph of success. “The dream of my life has come true,” he said. “The Brain will live! It will live forever, growing wiser than any man or any group of men. It will remake the world. Civilization. It will end wars. It will guide mankind into a garden of Eden. Utopia. It was *my* dream for mankind.”

He became aware of those watching him. The fire of fanaticism left his eyes. He relaxed, and laughed embarrassedly. “But right now congratulations are in order

for Dr. Frye. He's the one who has found the substance that makes it possible."

Nadine had been standing quietly on the sidelines, almost forgotten in this moment. She came forward now and extended her hand. "Congratulations, Dr. Frye," she said.

It was for effect. Earl heard himself say, "Maybe *you* are the one who should get the credit." He paid little attention. It was a show, an opera, and his body and hers were players reciting lines from a script.

But her hand in his was warm. He clung to the feel of it, thinking bitterly that now there was nothing else. What would become of him? He didn't care.

He sunk into a mood of utter defeat. It was all the worse, he realized, because right now, if the Cyberene had not come into the picture, if he had been left to himself, he would be deliriously happy—just as his own exterior self was seeming to be.

After a while he was back in the lab. His body was working on more elaborate experiments with the fluid. His vocal cords were humming a tune in a tone of absent-minded happiness.

He wished fervently that there were some way he could be wiped out completely. Gray walls around his awareness were not enough.

Not with the unbearable suffering.

The hours passed slowly for him. He tried not to think, to remain passive. It was no use. His bitterness was too strong. His sense of defeat was too overpowering.

His eyes glanced up at the door as it opened, then down at his wrist watch. It was three minutes after five. Nadine was in the doorway.

"It's time to go Earl," she said.

Go? Where? But his body hastily putting things in order as though it knew.

They left the building together, walked along the sidewalk as though they might be headed toward some dinner rendezvous. They left the sidewalk, and then Earl knew. They were going to the entrance to the time tube. They were going back to the year 3042. Why? He should have remained. Maybe this would create suspicion. But even as he thought that, he knew it wouldn't. Everyone would think he and Nadine were at some restaurant, perhaps later at some night spot. No one would bother to check and see if he came back to his rooms.

Ahead was the clear spot with its smooth convex depression. And the shimmering refraction in the air. Side by side he and Nadine walked toward it—and were in a corridor, the woodland scene wiped out.

No unusual sensation of any kind. Stepping across a thousand years was no different than crossing the threshold of a doorway.

George Ladd was there waiting for them. "The Cyberene wants to see both of you," he said. Nothing more. No paralysis gun, no guards to keep Earl from escaping. But he couldn't escape. He couldn't move a muscle of his own volition. "Okay," he heard himself say casually.

He and Nadine left the building and went through the beautiful park to the Dome. Inside, they walked along the seemingly roofless slightly curving corridor. He went to a small red square and stood on it. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Nadine do the same. From above, the glass boxes were lowered over them.

Something left him. Without having tested the feeling, he knew that he was in full possession of himself. He could command and his body, his voice, would obey.

He turned toward the glass wall facing Nadine. He pressed against it. She was doing the same.

"Nadine!" he said, and it was a greeting, a caress.

"Earl!"

And they were drinking in one another with their eyes.

"**V**ERY touching," a voice said. "One would think

you are in love with her, Earl Frye."

"Oh no. I—That is . . ." Earl stopped in amazement at the self revelation.

"Look at her," the Cyberene's voice said. "In spite of most careful conditioning starting in the lab tank in her pre-breathing stage, she feels the same way about you."

Nadine's lips were trembling with a smile. She was nodding.

Earl was irritated. "Did you bring me here just to tell me that?" he asked. "Or to torture me further?" he added bitterly.

"No. I brought you here to show you that I'm grateful. You did what I wanted done. The fact that it was done in spite of you makes no difference. It's done and can't be undone by you. You realize that?"

"To gloat. I might have known," Earl said contemptuously.

"Not that either. I want to reward you. I've thoroughly explored your mind. I know that if you give your word, you will keep it. I understand a little about your feeling on personal freedom. Now that the vital fluid is known to enough people so that nothing you can do would undo that, I'm willing to let you have Nadine. The real Nadine."

"Yes?" Earl said warily.

"Yes. All I ask in return is your promise not to try to undo

anything, and to go ahead with your work without ever mentioning what has happened. Once you give your promise, I will let you and Nadine go to your time and stay there, free agents."

Earl frowned. "I don't get it," he said. "I didn't expect anything like this from you."

"You thought that after I had by-passed you and accomplished my purpose I would eliminate you?" The Cyberene laughed. "You will find that I'm a very benevolent master." The video eyes seemed to glisten with joviality.

"I still don't get it," Earl said, puzzled. "You want my word that I won't interfere with anything you do from here on in."

"Yes. After all, there is a lot to do yet before the Brain in your time stream is activated. I must—"

"So!" Earl interrupted. "According to your theory of time that you so carefully explained to me, discovery of the vital nerve substance should have fixed up everything. It didn't."

"The Brain hasn't been activated yet in your time stream. When it has, then the future will reshape itself."

"I want to understand," Earl said. "As I understand it, some act, some *crucial* act, must be changed from the way it happened in the past—in my future in that past. Until that crucial moment

is changed from the way it happened, all the future stemming from it remains unaltered. The instant that crucial moment is changed, presto—the whole future from 1980 right down to 3042 does a mighty flip flop and *right here and now*, in that other Earth so close to this one, things will change as abruptly as the change of scene on a screen."

"That's correct."

"Then getting my lab reports correct wasn't the thing. There is still something to come, back there, that must be changed? In spite of everything up to now, you are still facing defeat? That's why you are willing to offer me so much?"

"You misunderstand my motives," the Cyberene said.

"I don't think so. You aren't dealing with a mind-slave now. You may be non-human, but you're a thinking mind. You have desires, motives for doing things, ways of doing them. In other words, you're a type. In offering me everything I want, you're out of your type—unless there's something you want that you can't get any other way. When I came in here I was licked. All I wanted was to die. Now I'm not so sure. I'm not even sure you know what you're doing. I have *hope*. *Do you understand that?*" Earl was trembling violently, a mixture of emotions coursing through him.

"I'm going to destroy you before I'm done. You're going to take control of me again and try to prevent that. You don't know whether you can or not because *you can't go into your future*. You can't even go into the past in any detail. How do I know that? I'm a scientist. I'm trained to put two and two together and get four. If you could go anywhere in the past you could have explored every detail of my future and know now what happened."

"Perhaps I do know," the Cyberene said. "You forget I'm attempting to *change* what happened. I have changed what happened. In the time stream the way it was originally, you discovered the right nerve fluid, and suppressed it. You faked a negative report on it. I've changed that much of the past already."

"Have you?" Earl said dully, his emotion spent. "All right then. Don't mind me. You're not going to get any promise from me no matter how much you torture me." His voice changed to cold bitterness. "I'm going to fight you to the end—and win. I don't know how, but the very fact that you haven't changed the present of that other Earth proves you haven't succeeded yet—and won't. *I'll win*. Then I'll destroy you, and Nadine and I can be free."

But somewhere along the line

the Cyberene had taken control again. Earl wasn't quite sure when his vocal cords stopped obeying his mental commands.

His body was standing quietly. He could not affect it. The gray walls were closing in around him, the pain growing. He didn't fight it. He welcomed the gray walls that clouded the channels to his conscious mind.

He sensed dimly that he and Nadine were going back the way they had come. Back to the time tube. Back to 1980, to what might be the final battle.

He was alone in his living quarters. He was aware of sleeping. Then it was morning, and he crept cautiously into his conscious mind, a hurt and wounded soul. And his conscious mind was serene and happy, unaware of his suffering as it began its day's work.

"**H**I, Earl."

Earl looked up with a smile. "Hello, Basil. How's things going with you and Irene?"

Basil smiled wryly. "Well . . . at least she's discovered that I'm a pretty fair dancer. She envies you. I guess I do too. You have all the luck."

"Nonsense! Discovering the right substance was like winning the Irish Sweepstakes."

"That's what I mean. You did nothing more than any of the rest

of us. It was pure chance that the right stuff was on a tray given to you to test. But in the history books your name will get the credit—just like it took brains."

Earl shrugged. "I'm afraid all our names will be left out. Dr. Glassman will get the credit. He master-minded the whole thing. He deserves the credit, too. The rest of us are just damned good chemists. That's all. He took the risks. If it hadn't paid off, the Dome would have been known as Glassman's Folly."

"Something in that," Basil said. "By the way, what have you found out about Nadine? You two seem quite palsy walsy now."

"She's what she claims to be," Earl said.

"Is she?" Basil said, his eyes narrowing. "I think you're lying. Matter of fact, you're different than you were. What's come over you?"

"Nothing, Basil."

"Nothing, he says," Basil said mournfully to the bench he was sitting on. "What's happened to you? Have you been bought?"

"What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean. Nadine came here under mysterious circumstances, to say the least. You were hot on the trail of something. You wanted me to help you follow her. I couldn't, because Irene had given me my first chance

to date her. So you followed her by yourself. What happened?"

"Sure," Earl said. "She went to the best hotel in town. I called her on a house phone and asked her to have dinner with me. She did."

"Did she tell you how she happened to be only four inches high and naked when you first met her?"

Earl stared at Basil in mock astonishment. "Basil," he said softly. "Haven't you ever heard of that terrible scourge of the human race—alcohol?"

"Don't give me that!" Basil said, his nostrils flaring. "You were stone sober. I was with you for an hour while you bought those clothes and patiently gathered fashion magazines that would show a dame who didn't know the first thing about it how to put them on. I saw Nadine in this lab, being carried off by a man. I was paralyzed by a ray gun or something from a gun. So were you."

"He's right, Earl."

Both men turned toward the door. It was Nadine. She closed the door and came into the lab.

"Maybe we should take him with us, Earl," she said. "If we don't, he's going to think the worst things about us. I know we swore you to secrecy, but he could wreck everything."

"Maybe you're right," Earl said.

"Oh no," Basil said, edging toward the door. "They *did* something to you, Earl. I'm not going to give them a chance to do the same thing to me."

"Don't be a fool," Earl said. "Let me at least explain things."

NADINE was edging toward the door to cut off Basil's escape. He saw this, and leaped past her to the door, pulling it open.

"Come back here and let me explain," Earl heard himself say.

"You can explain to the Secret Service," Basil said.

He shut the door on them. An impulse made him turn toward Dr. Glassman's office. He would tell him first, and if that didn't get results he would go to the S. S. boys.

He knocked on Glassman's door and pushed it open without waiting for an invitation.

"Dr. Glassman," he said quickly, "something very suspicious is going on around here. I should have told you about it sooner, but I thought Earl would be able to explain his actions, and Nadine's. Have you looked into her credentials? She isn't what she claims. I know, but I don't know how I'm going to prove it right now. She's done something to Earl. He isn't the same. They're in this together."

"Just a minute, Dr. Nelson," Glassman cut in. "Are you trying to say that Dr. Frye and Dr.

Holmes are in on some mad scheme to sabotage the Brain? You must be mad. Why, Dr. Frye discovered the chemical we've spent close to a million dollars searching for!"

"I know that," Basil said doggedly, "but just the same—"

"You're out of your mind. What are you trying to do? Curry favor with me at the expense of innocent and hard working people? I've a good notion to discharge you on the spot."

"You've got to listen to—"

"Get out. I'll hear no more of it."

Basil stared at him blankly, then nodded. "All right," he said, "but you're going to have to listen later. I'm taking it to the Secret Service. They'll have to listen."

He backed out, closing the door on Glassman's angry face. When he turned to go down the hall he saw Earl and Nadine coming toward him. With them was George Ladd, his right hand in his suit coat pocket over something bulging—the paralysis gun, maybe.

Basil turned the other way and down another hall, running with a speed born of fear and determination. He knew now he had been right.

A door opened. Irene came out, almost bumping into him. "Where are you going in such a hurry, Basil?" she demanded.

"Can't explain now," he said.

She stood in his way. "Come with me," he said desperately. "I'll explain on the way. Hurry."

She nodded. Together they ran down the hall and reached the side exit. Taking Irene's hand, Basil plunged away from the sidewalk through scattered trees, until they reached the parking lot. He unlocked his car with shaking fingers and told Irene to get in. He rushed around to the driver's side.

The motor caught instantly. He started with a clash of gears. In the rear view mirror he saw George Ladd running toward him. Then he reached the street—and almost immediately was slowed by heavy traffic.

Groaning under his breath, he made the best time he could. Irene watched him silently for two blocks.

"Aren't you going to tell me what it is?" she asked abruptly.

"He's after me," Basil said. "We've got to get there before he can stop me. You can listen when I tell the Secret Service about it."

Ahead was a traffic jam. Basil turned into a side street where he made better time. It was taking him forever to get there. But finally his destination was just ahead. The office building where the S. S. had its local office.

There was a parking space. Basil swerved toward it and braked to a stop. He reached past Irene and

opened her door.

"Get out and run for it," he said.

The screech of tires almost drowned his voice. He looked over his shoulder. A car had pulled up beside his in the street. He saw George Ladd behind the wheel, alone.

Frantically, Basil pushed Irene out and followed her, taking her hand as they ran toward the building entrance fifteen feet away.

"We've got to make it," he said. "We've got to . . ."

There was no sound, no light, from the weapon George Ladd pointed at them.

Basil sprawled forward. Before he hit the sidewalk, flame burst from his hair, his clothing.

Irene stopped, forgetting her danger or not knowing it. She bent down by Basil, reaching to help him. She remained in that position for a long second while her hair and clothing burst into flames, then crumpled against him.

Horried pedestrians drew back from the bodies, the stench of seared flesh. In the street a motor roared into life. The car with George Ladd sped away.

EARL turned away from the window. "George Ladd just brought my car back," he said. "I guess he isn't coming in. He's walking into the woods toward the tube entrance."

Nadine nodded casually.

Within his mental prison Earl worried. What had Ladd done? He wouldn't dare to kill Basil. The worst that could happen would be that Basil would be tak'n before the Cyberene and ma' into a mind-slave too.

There were footsteps in the hall. The door opened. It was Dr. Glassman, his lips set in a grim line.

"Dr. Frye," Glassman said. "Basil came to me with a story of something going on he didn't like. He accused you and Dr. Holmes of some scheme to sabotage the Brain."

"That's utter nonsense," Earl heard himself say.

"Why, I can't understand—" Nadine began.

"I thought so too," Glassman said, "until I received a telephone call from the police just now. Basil and Irene were killed a few moments ago while on their way to try to get the Secret Service to listen to what I refused to hear."

"Oh," Nadine said without expression. Earl said nothing. He was too stunned to think.

"I'm going to get to the bottom of this," Glassman went on grimly. "You may both consider yourselves relieved of your duties until the Secret Service has investigated thoroughly. Save your explanations until I've called them."

Earl tried to warn Glassman. He forced his lips open to call to him—and a wave of searing throbbing pain lashed at him, forcing him back behind the gray fog.

Through the mental haze he saw George Ladd in the doorway, a thirty-eight Colt automatic in his hand—something Glassman would understand.

"Come with me, Dr. Glassman," Ladd said expressionlessly.

WHEN Glassman returned an hour later, to all outward appearances he was unchanged, except that he made no mention of the deaths of Basil and Irene. Nor did he say anything about suspending Earl and Nadine.

From his own experience Earl knew that one part of Glassman was raging against his mental prison, perhaps feeling the sadistic torture with which the Cyberene kept him chained.

By a supreme effort Earl pulled himself away from thinking about what had happened. It multiplied his determination to free himself enough to defeat the Cyberene and destroy it. But raging impotently against the Brain's control wouldn't accomplish a thing.

Little by little he willed himself back to a frame of thought where he could reach out into his conscious mind again, matching his thoughts and moods with it. It

had somehow "forgotten" much of what had happened to Basil and Irene and Glassman. It was thinking about Nadine.

Earl thought about her too. She loved him. She didn't know what love was, but it was there, revealed in the brief moment she had been free to express herself. Was that love now making her try to overthrow the slavery of the Cyberene? Probably not. She was conditioned to accept that inhuman intellect as her master.

Earl shoved the real Nadine from his thoughts and dwelt on the Nadine that was manifest. She was easy to love too—and why not? She was everything that the true Nadine was—except that she was not the *complete* Nadine. She was falling in love with him too. And his own conscious mind was in love with her. Why not make the most of it?

He inserted the idea into his conscious thoughts, and to his delight no alarm bells rang. The Cyberene didn't interfere.

"Let's go to a dance tonight after work," he said.

"A dance? I don't know how to dance."

"I'll teach you. It isn't hard to pick up."

"All right," Nadine said.

Earl worked hard the rest of the day. Tank trucks were bringing the nerve fluid to the Dome in

a never ending stream. Every load had to be tested before it was unloaded into the storage tanks, to make sure its quality was up to standard. One five thousand gallon load could contaminate it all.

At six o'clock he was relieved of his work. He dressed eagerly, finding no difficulty in *meshing* one hundred per cent with the desires of his conscious mind. He picked up Nadine at her hotel.

Crestmont boasted only two places worth going. One was just a dance floor, the other The Barn, with a small orchestra and diners.

"The orchestra isn't as good here at The Barn," Earl said when they went in, "but we can have a table and enjoy ourselves."

They ordered their dinner. The orchestra started playing and soon the floor was fairly crowded. Earl took Nadine's hand and led her to the dance floor. After a few steps she discovered that she could dance quite easily. It delighted her.

They returned to their table finally, and ate. Afterward they danced again. Two of the other scientists were there with their partners. They nodded at Earl and Nadine but didn't join them.

During all this, Earl was careful not to insert any feeling, any impulse of his own into his conscious mind. What he intended to

do must come as a surprise to both Nadine and the Cyberene, and afterwards they must think it to be the product of that conscious mind—not Earl himself.

His opportunity arose naturally. While they were dancing he spoke to her. She lifted her face to smile at him. Swiftly he kissed her, letting his lips linger until the throbbing and an angriess beat into him and a power outside himself pulled him back.

He retreated in his mind, afraid even to think, lest the Cyberene sense his thoughts and realize what he had been trying.

"Why did you do that?" he heard Nadine say from a great distance, through waves of torture.

His own voice replied, "That was a kiss."

"How disgusting," Nadine said.

Had she meant that? Or were those just words put in her mouth by the Cyberene.

"It's one of our customs," Earl's voice said. "Watch the others on the dance floor. Quick! See that couple over at the corner table?"

Earl crept cautiously into his conscious mind to watch Nadine. She studied the couple, puzzled. She looked up into his face thoughtfully and began dancing again. "Maybe," she said, "it won't seem so disgusting if we try it again."

Her lips parted. Earl felt his head bend toward her. He felt the kiss, but held himself cautiously alert for the first sign of disapproval from the Cyberene. It didn't come.

The moment passed. Earl began to relax. Had the Cyberene assumed it was a natural action of his conscious mind divorced from him? If so, then a major hurdle had been met successfully.

"It is rather pleasant," Nadine said. Then, thoughtfully, "So that's a kiss."

Earl looked at her sharply. Was it possible that the real Nadine had caused those words to be spoken? Maybe. It provided a new avenue of speculation. Had Nadine long ago discovered what he was so patiently trying now—how to circumvent the control of the Cyberene? She could have, but not seeing any reason to do so, kept her talent hidden

TWO more days passed. Earl forgot his caution and boldly cooperated with his conscious mind on the many tasks that took up his time. And strangely he was almost free of pain, though it never entirely left.

Dr. Glassman took all the scientists with him on a tour of inspection within the Brain. The millions of fine glass tubes and hollow bulbs that comprised the Brain would

soon start being filled with nerve fluid. Although tons of pressure per square inch were required to force it into the tubes, once there, capillary attraction pulled it along.

On the first trip Earl retreated from his conscious mind as much as possible, while still watching everything around him closely. He had been inside the Brain many times before—but never with any thought of discovering a weakness where it could be destroyed.

That was the task he had set himself. It was an almost impossible one. Destroying the Brain now, in 1980, might not accomplish his purpose. The damage could be repaired.

He thought of dynamite and rejected it. It would deteriorate long before 3042, and even if it remained potent, it would do no more than damage a small part of the Brain—not enough to more than partially impair its thinking or give it a case of specialized forgetfulness. A dynamite explosion in such an enormous brain would be equivalent to a blood clot on a human brain.

Nothing better presented itself to him on that first trip. Was he going to fail?

The next day pumping of the nerve fluid began. The masses of hair-fine glass tubing lost their appearance of glass wool and began to appear as individual threads of

yellowish orange.

It would be many days before the "loading", as it was termed, would be completed, but everyone was kept busy watching it, and catching broken threads as they started to ooze fluid, sealing them with a special formula sealer.

During these days a dozen plans to destroy the Brain occurred to Earl. Each had its defects that would make it fail. As the "loading" neared its last day, only one possibility remained.

Great precautions had been taken to make the Brain free from vibration. The slightest sound of almost any frequency, if continued long enough, would find a nerve strand that would vibrate to it and snap.

A loudspeaker broadcasting at full power over the entire range of sound would be more devastating to the Brain than a ton of dynamite exploded in its heart. There was the answer—Vibration!

But once again there was the problem of installing it, and being able to use it after a thousand years. Install it and use a clock to trigger it? That was one possibility. Clocks run by atomic power would keep accurate time over much longer periods.

But there was the problem of getting the Cyberene to agree to the installation of such a device. That was necessary. During the days

that Earl had studied the Cyberene's control of his conscious mind he had found no way to gain any sort of positive control which the Cyberene couldn't shunt out at once. Therefore whatever plan he devised must meet with the approval of the Cyberene.

Tentatively he inserted a bold thought, feeling sure that the Cyberene wouldn't attribute it to him, but merely to the logical processes of his conscious mind.

What if the Brain doesn't develop along lines sympathetic to you? He elaborated upon it, feeding worry thoughts along with it. A second Brain might not follow the line of development of the first, any more than one human develops like another, even when they are twins. Rather than accomplishing his aim of having a second Cyberene on the other Earth in 3042, holding the human population in slavery, it might prove a more formidable enemy than the people of that Earth. And if that turned out to be the case, wouldn't it be better to have a trump card? Some way of destroying the second Cyberene at any time? Even if it were friendly to the first, it might want to be boss. Power of life and death over it would prevent that.

Earl's conscious mind, entirely cooperative with the Cyberene, soon began to think very domin-

antly along those lines. Earl sat back and waited for some reaction from the Cyberene. It was not long in coming.

At five o'clock Nadine looked him up and informed him that they were to report to the Cyberene at once.

"I HAVE detected certain thoughts in your mind," the voice of the Cyberene sounded. "I would like to hear what you have to say."

Earl sensed his mind rallying its thoughts. "I've been wondering what the other Cyberene would be like. That's all. There's no guarantee that it will have any special traits that will make it what you want it to be, and once it's started it's out of your control, isn't it?"

"That's true. Time travel and even fifth dimension travel is extremely limited. Once the other Cyberene is generated, I can't contact it until 3042—now."

"Can you look into your future and see—"

"Unfortunately, no. I can't even see into your tomorrow. I might, perhaps, jump to the year 4104 A. D., but even that is beyond my present ability and instruments. It may be many centuries before I understand everything about hyperspace."

"That's what I surmised," Earl

heard himself say. He stole a glance at Nadine, who was watching him attentively. "That's why I think, for your own protection, you should be able to destroy the other Cyberene instantly—if it isn't what you hope it will be."

"How?" The Cyberene's voice was vibrant with eagerness.

"The basic device would be sound vibrations in the air, inside its braincase. A loud continuous sound of nearly all frequencies would cause billions of nerve strands to vibrate, and enough of them would break to destroy the functioning of the whole. That could be built into it in 1980. The problem is to decide how to trigger it. Do you have any ideas?"

"It's very simple," the Cyberene said. "It will never forget once it learns something. Before its mind integrates into a self aware ego, attach a relay to some motor outlets. Decide on some key combination of sounds that might be spoken. Repeat them into the auditory centers of the Brain, at the same time tripping the relay. Keep doing that until utterance of the sequence of sounds causes the relay to trip. When that response is automatic, connect the relay to the loudspeaker. Once you have done that, report to me. Then all I need do is contact the second Cyberene, in this age, and if I want to destroy it I can repeat the

sounds."

Earl, in his mental cubicle, chuckled. He could not have thought of a better way himself.

"And," the Cyberene said, "in order to account for your task, you had better 'sell' Glassman on the idea. Tell him it's so that *mankind* can destroy the Brain if necessary. But make sure no one in 1980 knows the key sounds. You may return to 1980."

"I'VE had much the same thought," Victor Glassman said, chewing on his lip. "I rather hated to think about it though. Destroy my Creation? Still, I suppose it's wise—to be *able* to." He stood up and came around from behind his desk.

Earl and Nadine watched without speaking as he clasped his hands behind his back and went to the window of his office which brought him a view of part of the giant dome housing the Brain.

"Every precaution is being taken otherwise. Until we can be sure of ourselves we don't intend letting the Brain have control of any machines or weapons. Of course we could forget that danger, in time, and suddenly wake up to the fact that we were too late. Then it would be nice to still be able to . . . All right. Go ahead. Keep it under your hats though. And when you're done we can form

a select group, handing the—"he smiled wryly,—“password down from generation to generation.”

“I have the plans all drawn up,” Earl said. “An electrostatic speaker, because it can be built with parts that will last forever. No moving parts in the frequency generator or amplifier. Leads to the permanent busses that will supply current for such things as video eyes and the voice speaker system . . .”

“Good. Good. Only we will indoctrinate that Mind early so that it will never do anything detrimental to us.”

“Of course,” Earl soothed. “This is only precautionary.”

DAYS followed one another swiftly. A factory-made electrostatic loudspeaker arrived, and was dismantled so that some of its parts could be replaced with more durable ones. Specifications for the frequency generators and the amplifier were farmed out, and the completed units arrived.

There was trouble with the relay. It was well designed, but there was doubt whether it would still be in working condition after ten centuries. Earl sent specifications to a jewelry manufacturer in Kansas City and had its moving parts made of synthetic ruby and platinum.

The Cyberene *watched* every

step of construction—and so did Earl, from within his artificially created mental wall, careful not to reveal the huge holes he had knocked in it.

With the arrival of the remade relay, Earl and Nadine entered the Brain, setting up a vibration-proof chassis in its innermost heart where the maze of fine spun glass was now a maze of yellowish threads containing a fluid with exactly the same properties as human nerve fluid.

Outside, swarming over the catwalks and dotting the immense corridor circling the Brain, were dozens of technicians and experts, beginning the task of barraging the gigantic man-made brain with a never ending sequence of visual and audible sensory impressions which, according to theory, would eventually synthesize that miracle of creation loosely known as thought in the thousands of tons of glass and nerve fluid.

Using a portable low power microscope and the techniques he had acquired during the months of work on the Brain in its construction, Earl attached motor buds to randomly chosen nerves, and sensory buds to others, attaching them to the transistors that would feed the relay, so that the action of the relay would set up nerve impulses in the Brain. When it had been done, he used sensitive detectors

to make sure ion currents were generated in the nerves.

Where those nerve impulses went to among the billions of "brain cells" didn't matter. All that mattered was that they went *some-where*, so that the basic property of association would "hook them on" to the auditory impression created by speaking the code word or sequence of code sounds.

"What should we use as the code sounds?" Nadine asked as their task neared completion.

"I've been trying to think of something," Earl said.

And in his mental prison Earl had been trying to think of the same thing, keeping track of his conscious mind's thoughts on the subject—even influencing them at times.

It would have to be a sequence of sounds that stood no chance whatever of being spoken to the Brain during the next thousand years. Otherwise they might be spoken by chance and the Brain destroyed.

"How about nonsense syllables?" Nadine suggested.

Earl grinned. "Those are the most dangerous of all. Take Y.M.C.A. It's the initials of a huge organization. Any nonsense sequence of letters, no matter how long, might someday be the letters of some organization."

Nadine frowned in bewilderment.

"But what else is there? If we take any sequence of sensible words, they might be repeated in reference to something else at any time."

"Not if they're *very* special," Earl said, and it was the real Earl Frye, almost completely out of his mental walls and daring discovery recklessly, who was speaking now.

An impish light glowed in Nadine's eyes, making Earl almost sure that the real Nadine had sensed long ago what he was doing and had done the same, *meshing* cautiously with her conscious mind until at times, camouflaged by its normal thoughts, she could *appear*.

"Kiss me, Earl Frye," she said, lifting her face toward his.

"The pleasure is all mine, Nadine Holmes," he said, cupping her face in his hands and pressing his lips to hers. "And that's what I mean," he murmured through imprisoned lips. "No one else, through all the ages, will say those words, let alone say them in the same way."

She drew back. "No!" she said abruptly. "The Cyberene has promised that we can stay in your time, free to do as we please. That would mean that we would have to be in the future—in *my* time."

"But only until the Cyberene could make sure," Earl said, glad that she had made that objection. It would allay the Cyberene's sus-

picious if it had any.

A telepathed thought impinged on Earl's mind, and from Nadine's expression, 'on-hers-too. *Earl is right. I have thought of the problem of what the key sound should be. He has hit on the right answer. It must be your voices, filled with emotion, speaking those words you just spoke.*

Again Earl relaxed with a mental sigh of relief. He had reached his goal. There was nothing more for him to do now, except wait. His conscious mind would carry on the details under the supervision of the Cyberene.

A MICROPHONE was brought into the Brain, already attached to the auditory centers of the Brain. Earl examined the microphone, then went in search of another type. "We must have one with a contact button on it," he explained, "so that just the key words impinge on the Brain when we close the relay manually."

At last everything was ready. "Now!" Earl said.

Nadine lifted her face and closed her eyes. "Kiss me, Earl Frye," she said.

Earl released the button. "That isn't the way," he said. "Imagine we are alone in the universe, and we are about to die. Imagine swirling mists about to envelope you and drag you away from me

forever, and this is the last kiss you'll ever get!"

"Oh, no!" Nadine whispered, opening her eyes wide. "That must never happen! The Cyberene has promised!"

"Close your eyes and imagine it is," Earl said. "Close your eyes. Now—there are swirling mists. Your world of dreams has crashed around you. Ahead is—destruction. You can't escape it. It's coming, closer. You're going to die, but before you do you want—"

"Kiss me, Earl Frye," Nadine said.

"That's it. Say it again." Earl pressed the mike button.

"Kiss me, Earl Frye . . ."

Earl closed his eyes. It was the end. In another moment he would die. He had failed. He held this in his mind's eye. With a mixture of sadness and tenderness, and bitterness, he said, "The pleasure is all mine, Nadine Holmes," and tripped the relay with his fingers.

Would it work? After the hundredth try he began to wonder. But the repeated words with their inflections, their subtle differences in repetition, had to build up in the Brain, synthesize, associate with the sensation of the tripping of the relay—and connect. There was as yet no mind functioning in that mass of glass and nerve fluid. No ready made paths to coordinated concepts, conscious thought.

It was the next day before his fingers felt the relay trip of its own accord. *Drama*, he thought, feeling the thrill of that sentient movement. He said nothing to Nadine, not wanting to end their game. And the next time the relay didn't trip. And the next. But the next time it did, and the next and the next . . .

"YOU'RE done?" Dr. Glassman said, rubbing his hands in great satisfaction. He lowered his voice to a whisper. "What is the code word?"

Earl winked at Nadine, then looked around in a pretense at making sure no one could hear. "We picked L.S.M.F.T.," he whispered. "I figured that since a cigarette company had used that in its advertising years ago, it would never be used again by anybody."

"Excellent!" Glassman beamed. "Excellent! To think that by uttering those five letters this entire project, representing millions of dollars—before it's a completely integrated Mind—can be *shattered*." He looked around him, exuding a sense of his newly acquired power.

"And," Earl said ruefully, "I guess that winds up everything for me in Project Brain, doesn't it? I hope so. I could use a vacation."

Dr. Glassman looked slyly from Earl to Nadine. "Are congratu-

lations in order?"

Earl bent swiftly and whispered in Glassman's ear, "I haven't asked her yet. I wanted to wait until our work was over. You know, business before pleasure."

"Ha ha!" Glassman chuckled knowingly, looking at Nadine with an I-know-a-secret look. "You're a man after my own heart, Earl." Then, more soberly, "Yes, I guess you are due for a vacation. And your consultant duties are finished, Dr. Holmes. I'll miss both of you."

Earl and Nadine left Glassman outside the Brain, and returned to the lab annex. They didn't speak as they walked down the hall to Earl's lab. They stood just inside the door, looking over the scene of machines and instruments and tables and bottles which had been their surroundings for so long.

Earl looked at the lab table where he had first seen Nadine, so many days—it seemed ages—ago. He would never see this place again. He entertained no illusions about the future. The Cyberene would never permit them to return to 1980.

With heavy feet he went across the lab to his living quarters. He began packing, and Nadine sat on the arm of a chair, watching.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"Packing my belongings to take with us," Earl said.

"Oh, but you don't need to do that. We'll be back in a few hours—a day or two at the most. The Cyberene has promised. Just as soon as it makes sure it doesn't need us."

"Sure," Earl said, "but I'll take them just the same. Then when we come back we can go straight to the airport and catch a plane to Miami or someplace and get married."

Fifteen minutes later they left the lab. They walked along the familiar sidewalk to the spot where they always cut through the woods toward the hill, circling it so no one would know where they had gone.

They reached the clearing. Ahead, shimmering in the evening sun, was the familiar refractive outline in the atmosphere. There was no breeze to stir the still leaves. A meadowlark broke the silence with its call, and was silent. Over the trees the giant dome that housed the Brain loomed, unbelievable in its enormous bulk.

Nadine took his hand and stopped him. "Kiss me, Earl Frye," she said, her lips trembling.

Earl looked down at her upturned face. Did she know? Perhaps the real Nadine, within, sensed what was to come.

Or perhaps she didn't.

The tom tom beat of pain began within him. He forced his way through it, taking her into his arms.

"The pleasure is all mine, Nadine Holmes," he murmured.

Their lips met, tenderly, then crushed together with the fierceness of passion.

Their lips parted, lingeringly, regretfully. They drew back, to look into each other's eyes for a brief moment, a moment Earl knew the Cyberene had given them to make more bitter what was to come.

Earl saw the glow fade from Nadine's eyes. As he picked up his suitcases he heard someone approaching.

Victor Glassman joined them, his face gray, his expression wooden.

This was it. Glassman might be missed. There might be an investigation, but Project Brain would go on regardless of that now. And the only ones who might stop it were here.

Side by side they walked toward the barely perceptible refractive shimmer. Beyond it they could see the woodland, a Bluejay's flashing wings, a chipmunk standing upright, observing them. And then they were standing in the familiar hall, in the year 3042.

George Ladd was not there, but there was no need for him to be there. Their bodies, controlled by the Mind that enslaved them, walked on toward the far exit and the garden they would cross—to the Dome, the Cyberene.

THERE was no turning back now. Nor would there be other days to perfect the technique of *meshing* with his mind. Earl reached out into every part of his thoughts, thinking them, identifying himself with them, with the desires of the Cyberene. In that other Earth so close to this there would now be a second Cyberene. There must be, since nothing stood in the way of its developing throughout the ten centuries and more since they had left it, a few minutes ago.

They entered the garden and paused. Earl dropped his two suitcases beside the path. He took Nadine's hand in his. They went on toward the portal that led into the Dome.

They walked down the silent circling corridor under the network of catwalks and ladders, past panels of instruments whose needles fluctuated with life, to the red squares over which hung the glass cages, ready to be lowered. Would they be lowered, separating them from each other while they faced the Cyberene?

The glittering lenses of the two video cameras moved as they went toward them, keeping them in line.

"All of you occupy one square," the Cyberene's voice instructed.

They obeyed without sign of emotion. The glass cage was lowered over them. Its front wall be-

came a window through which they were looking at the familiar Dome.

But it was a structure around which weeds grew in thick profusion, with its acres of exposed surface pitted by time, untended.

"What happened?" Earl said. "Do you mean to say that there is still something to be done?"

"There is nothing to be done," the Cyberene said dully. "I have checked in that other time stream. There is still positive record that the Brain was not activated."

"Maybe it takes time for the momentum of events to force the change," Earl suggested.

Didn't the Cyberene suspect yet? Didn't it *realize*?

"No," the Cyberene said dully. "I have failed. More, I have rechecked the mathematical basis of the theoretical picture, and think I know where I erred. The cause of the split that created two Earths, travelling close together down through so many centuries, could not have been something occurring in the original time stream. It took something applied from the fifth dimension—and in the neighborhood of the split that could only have been one thing, *the force with which the time tube hooked onto 1980*. It had to be that. The accident. I didn't take it into account."

"That's what I've thought all along," Earl said quietly.

"At that instant," the Cyberene

went on as though it hadn't heard him, "the split occurred. You became two Earl Fries, to mention one facet of the split. One of you went its way, making an accurate report of its experiments, creating me eventually—"

While the Cyberene talked, the desolate scene vanished, and the glass cage lifted upward slowly, as though it were a curtain, lifting for the final scene.

The twin lenses of the Cyberene's video eyes were fixed on them, alive with an intelligence that was unhuman.

"No," Earl said. "*That* one of me discovered the identity of the nerve substance, but suppressed it."

"That couldn't be," the Cyberene objected. "Nothing appeared in its life to cause it to do that. You were the one who had the data to make such a decision."

"But I reported accurately," Earl said. *Even yet it didn't see!*

"I know," the Cyberene said, "but it can't be, because then that electrostatic speaker would be—" It stopped.

"Deep inside of you," Earl continued. "Waiting only for—"

A WAVE of emotion blasted into his mind, driving him by its very force into the deep recesses behind his wall of gray, into a cosmos of mind wrenching pain.

"No!" the thought blasted into him. "No human can have the power to destroy me! It can't exist. *You* can't exist another instant, with the danger to me!"

In agony Earl reached out, meshing little by little with his conscious mind, *feeling* its terror and fear of death, calming it, controlling it with all the infinite skill he had learned during the past weeks.

And even as he gained control against the will of the Cyberene he realized with a sinking feeling the essential weakness of his plan. Nadine!

He had been criminally stupid, blinded by emotion toward her. She was conditioned from birth to accept the domination of the mind of the Cyberene.

Sweating with the terrible effort it took to hold on, he forced his muscles to permit him to turn toward her. His worst fears were realized. She stood there, her face a calm mask that revealed no emotion.

Abruptly the raging force of thought and searing torture from the Cyberene calmed. In its place was cold triumph.

"So you have been able to defeat me in your own mind," it said. "You made *your* error in calculation too. Nadine Holmes. She is mine."

"Nadine Holmes?" It was Na-

dine who uttered the two words, her lips trembling with terrible effort, beads of sweat dotting her smooth forehead.

Hope surged into Earl's thoughts. "But you can't allow her to live either, can you?" he said. "In another moment you must destroy us both, so that nothing can ever threaten your existence. We will have only another minute or two before you reach into us, plunging us into the gray swirling mists of death, where we will be separated forever. *There is no way we can avoid that now, is there?*"

Nadine had turned toward Earl, every muscle of her slim body protesting under the domination of the Cyberene. Earl was forgotten by the Brain as it concentrated on the battle against Nadine.

She held out her arms, perspiring with the effort. "Kiss me, Earl Frye," she whispered.

A blast of fear flowed into Earl's mind. He fought to the surface of thought, clinging there, calming himself. But defeat was close—impossible to avoid.

It had been a wonderful plan to destroy this thing that ruled the minds of men, making them its slaves. Resistance was useless. In another moment he would be dead.

Bitterly, hopelessly, with infinite sadness, he said, as though somewhere long ago he had repeated it

before, a tender ritual whose meaning now escaped him, "The pleasure is all mine, Nadine Holmes . . ."

Their lips met with the tenderness of farewell.

A *SOUND* came into being, seeming to come from far away, yet seeming to exist everywhere, with no point of origin. It was at the same time a deep rumble and an insane, high screaming—and every sound in between that had ever been uttered by voice or machine or unleashed elements in desolate places. It was soulless, yet holding within itself the torment of every lost soul since the beginning of time.

It forced its way into Earl's consciousness, hung there as though stopped by some hidden barrier. Abruptly it swept forward, and as it swept into the farthest reaches of Earl's mind it washed away throbbing pain, the sense of inescapable doom, leaving a *sense of freedom*—a clean freshness, an emotion of peace.

A rapid coruscation of words, syllables, and sounds whispered and blasted from the voice box of the Cyberene as neural circuits within the Brain snapped or short-circuited.

Earl and Nadine lifted their heads in startled surprise and a new awakening. They saw the

glittering lens eyes that had been watching them jerk spasmodically. Within the lens of one electronic eye a flash of blue fire exploded. Then both eyes became motionless, dead, pointed in different directions.

Overhead, giant blinding bolts of unleashed current leaped from copper bars to catwalks. The smell of molten and burning metal filled the air. Then, as though cut off by some hidden hand, the unholy sound within the Brain stopped. The arcing surges of electric power in the catwalks and power lines overhead stilled.

There was silence, and motionless clouds of white and gray smoke.

It took a moment for Earl to realize that in defeat he had won. It took another moment for him to realize that it was not he who had won, but Nadine—her love for him—a love that had grown in a girl who had never known that love existed.

There was no doubt of it now as he watched the play of expression that crossed her face. Fear, doubt, hope, desperate hope, living hope, love, fear, then all the love that had developed within her, shining from her face with the spiritual brilliance of a brilliant sun.

"Earl!" It was a glad cry. She clung to him as though she would never let him go.

For that matter, she would never need to, he thought, as he drew her closer. They would need each other for the rest of their lives. Or for a dozen lifetimes if they could have that many.

"My God!" The words exploded into their minds. They had been uttered by Dr. Glassman, and they contained all the horror, the comprehension of everything that had happened, that the mind-enslavement had given to him.

"It's over now," Earl said. "The Cyberene is dead."

Glassman shook his head vigorously. "It should never have existed in the first place," he said. "All my dreams of what it could do to help humanity. We've got to destroy the Brain in 1980, before any of this can happen."

Earl shook his head, looking at Nadine. "Nadine and I are staying here," he said quietly. "There's work to do that only we can do. People, their minds freed for the first time, bewildered, needing to be led a little ways into the path of freedom until they can care for themselves. A future to build—from 3042."

"You can stay if you must." Glassman said, his voice vibrant with the shock and horror of what he had experienced, "but I'm going back—to prevent this 3042 from ever happening. I can do it. I can trip that relay manually. It

will destroy—" His voice broke. "—my life's work. But it has to be done."

He turned and ran blindly.

EARL made no move to stop him. He watched him vanish around the bend of the corridor, waiting fatalistically. Would the scientist be able to wipe out this time-stream? Deep within him, Earl felt it couldn't be done. The Cyberene had tried to change the past, and failed.

Perhaps the Cyberene had been wrong in what it believed had caused the split in time that produced two Earths. Maybe one part of Glassman would be unable to bring itself to destroy its Creation, the Brain. Maybe that's what had happened. Maybe Glassman, torn between two opposed de-

cisions, had been able to act on neither

Earl put his arm around Nadine. They walked slowly along the curving corridor, circling the dead Brain, going toward the outside. They would have work to do. Work that only they, the coalition of 1980 and 3042 could accomplish together.

There were people here in this world of 3042. How many or how few didn't matter. They were the nucleus, the beginnings of a future that would grow from 3042. They were the not-born, created in the laboratory. They would have to be taught about life. And love.

And other things that free men know

THE END



"EE-E-EE!"

JABBERWOCK, BEWARE!

By

Richard A. Sternbach

The aliens offered Earth one chance for survival: beat them in an intellectual duel. So Joe Waters rose to the task, grim — and drunk! . . .

THE Security Council was in emergency session. The four delegates would have had easier consciences had more nations been represented, but it was hard to travel now. Only Russia, England and France were able to send their men to New York.

Sergei Moskov, USSR, presided unofficially. He wore a harried look, and addressed them wearily.

"To think, gentlemen, that it has taken circumstances like these to bring us into accord!"

The others said nothing. Overhead, above New York's stone and glass UN building that had been conceived in hope and wrought with faith, they could hear the whine of the patrolling ships. The delegates stared at the table in front of them.

"Your country, Mr. Conrad," Moskov said to the American rep-

resentative, "is the mother of our last hope." He looked around the table for concurrence. Sir Manly straightened a bit, and M. Tourneau's mustache twitched, but they all nodded. What use national pride now? There was not much time, anyway. Tonight . . .

"He will be here?" Moskov asked.

Conrad cleared his throat. He reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a slip of paper.

"Joe—I mean, Dr. Waters—sent an answer to our request." He read:

"I take my vorpal sword in hand. Beware, Jabberwock — I come. Joe Waters."

"The courage of youth," Sir Manly said, but he smiled.

Moskov looked at his watch. "He should be here, then."

"I am."

They all turned at the sound of



that voice, and rose as Joe Waters strode in. Just thirty years old, athletic, brilliant. He was accompanied by a wizened character in a baggy brown suit and crumpled felt hat.

"Gentlemen." Joe said, and bowed. They all sat down.

"A friend," he explained, indicating his companion. "Name of Mike."

"Friend *and* buddy," Mike said in a whiskey-hoarse voice.

"We thought you understood, Dr. Waters," Moskov said, eyeing Mike distastefully, "that this was to be a secret conference."

M. Tourneau, who had a sensitive nose, shifted his chair slightly away from the bum.

Joe said, "I met Mike in a bar last night and he's been with me since. I like his unsophisticated point of view."

"Bar!" Sir Manly exclaimed, visibly shaken.

"Bar." Joe answered. "For the same reason I'm here now." He leaned forward.

"I happened to be looking at the moon with my girl when they blew it up." His eyes narrowed at the memory. "She started to cry, and was still at it when we got back to her apartment. That's when I went to a bar to get drunk. It's also one reason I'm here. When they take the moon away from lovers, it's the last straw!"

"Give 'em hell, kid!" Mike rasped. Joe silenced him with a wave of his hand, and Mike slouched down in his chair looking hurt.

"Mr. Conrad," Moskov said, "will you be good enough to give Dr. Waters the latest developments?"

"All right. Joe, you know what's happened this past week."

Joe nodded.

"In case you didn't get the overall picture—their ships," he jerked a thumb at the whine passing back and forth above, "have completely blanketed the world. They have destroyed every means of defense we've used against them. Atomic anti-aircraft, even, hasn't fazed them in the least.

"Yesterday they sent for us. The head of their expedition told us who they are, and it accounts, perhaps, for their anthropoidal appearance. They are from Jupiter, so it's not inconceivable after all that similar forms of life should become dominant in the same solar system.

"They are easily twice our size—and if ability to learn and speak fluently in a half hour, each of the three languages represented here means anything, they have a proportionate I.Q.

"Their leader, Slan, says his title means he is the crown prince of the royal Jovian family. Slan was nothing if not courteous and

chivalrous. He told us yesterday he would give us a sporting chance for survival—why, I can't imagine. Apparently this expedition is like a glorified fox hunt to them.

"We are to choose a person to represent the world in an intellectual duel with him. If we win, they withdraw completely, never to bother us again. If we lose, then, he said, we're not worth saving and we'll be completely destroyed—hunted individually, which to them is great sport.

"To prove they could do it, he had his ship's guns turn on the moon. You saw what happened—disintegrated completely."

"Them crumbs!" Mike grated. "We'll murder 'em, Joe!"

"Quiet, Mike."

Mike grumbled, pulled out a cigarette paper and tobacco and rolled his own.

"That's why we've called on you," Conrad said.

"Waters," Sir Manly said, "the world rests on your shoulders."

"You have every qualification," M. Tourneau put in.

"Your brilliant theories in symbolic logic and theoretical mathematics," said Sir Manly.

"Chess champion of the world," Moskov added respectfully.

"Your contributions to astrophysics," Conrad said.

"And don't you guys forget—he won the decathlon when he was

just a high school kid. He'll murder them bums!"

Joe smiled. "Don't mind my pugnacious friend."

"You are, so far as we know, the finest representative the world could have." Moskov looked serious, and Joe became aware suddenly of the awful burden involved. What use intellectual ability or athletic prowess, compared to Jovian standards? Wasn't there someone—even a science-fiction writer, perhaps—better qualified to handle a situation as fantastic as this? Apparently not.

"When's the funeral?" Joe asked drily.

"Please, m'sieu, a little respect for the situation!" M. Tourneau looked pained.

"The contest is to be in Slan's ship at eight o'clock tonight," Moskov answered. "They will pick you up here in five hours."

"You and me both, Joe," Mike said.

"Yeah," Joe answered, and now he was mentally reeling under the impact of his responsibility. "Let's have a drink first. I think we'll need one."

Sir Manly paled. "I say . . ."

"We'll murder them damn Greeks," Mike chortled.

"**S**HAY, I'm not goin' in that thing," Mike protested.

"Can't fight 'em if we don't,"

Joe answered mournfully.

"They're big enough, all right," Mike admitted respectfully. "Wouldn't some football coach like to have one o' *them* on his squad!"

"C'mon, le's go." Joe shoved Mike toward the waiting ship, at the door of which a behemoth of a figure waited patiently, watching with some apparent disdain as the two, arms around each other's shoulders, weaved unsteadily inside.

Inside the ship, Joe took a long pull at the bottle Mike passed him. Strange, he thought, how an unforeseeable factor, upsetting life's routine equations, produces unguessed mental reactions. Until last night he'd never had a drink in his life. Then a little thing like the moon being blown up Aloud he quoted,

"Yet what are all such mysteries to me

Whose life is full of indices and surds?

$$x^2 + 7x + 53 \\ -11/3"$$

"Whassat?"

"Lewish Carroll," Joe answered, and wondered greatly at the vast amounts of liquor he had consumed in a short space of time.

"Beware the Jabberwock, my son . . ."

And Joe Waters, the world's most brilliant human, passed out.

THEY left Joe in the ship and dragged Mike before Slan. That gigantic figure sat in regal splendor at the end of a long corridor that ran the length of the vessel. On either side of Mike, as he stumbled toward the throne which seemed miles away, uniformed giants stood at attention. Had he stretched his arm he might have been able to rap a belt buckle. The sensation of being a pygmy increased as he approached Slan.

Grouped around Slan, whose throne was on a platform several feet high, stood members of what seemed to be a retinue. They sneered and snickered as Mike drew near, and Mike had to strain his neck and blurred eyes to see them.

"Are you ready to begin?" Slan asked in a voice that nearly deafened Mike.

"We'll murder ya, ya bums," Mike answered belligerently. His whiskey-fogged mind somehow assumed Joe was still by his side.

"Very well, then." And Slan extended an arm toward Mike, thumb pointed up.

Mike promptly repeated the gesture, except that he pointed *his* thumb down.

Slan reached for a huge flagon of red liquid, which he poured slowly onto the floor. Mike stared, then reached into a hip pocket

and produced a bottle of whiskey, swallowed some and vigorously smacked his lips. Then he held the bottle out to Slan, grinning broadly.

Slan reached into a bag at his side, took out a handful of colored pebbles, and scattered them on the floor. Mike scrambled after them and stuffed them into his pocket, then struggled erect, panting with the exertion.

Slan arose from his throne, stepped off the platform, and towered over Mike.

"You surprise me," he boomed. "You and your little planet are smarter than I expected. Go, and tell your people that they could not have chosen a worthier representative."

It was a dazed and confused Mike who was led stumbling, and clutching his bottle, back to the ship which was to take him to a free world.

* * *

Slan, meanwhile, found himself besieged by annoyed and puzzled followers. He held up his hand for silence, and relapsed into native Jovian.

"That earthling," he said sarcastically, "seems to have fared better than you who are so proud of your intellects.

"When I held my thumb up, indicating our superiority in size and strength, he pointed his

thumb down, to show that physical power is really of minor importance.

"I poured a red liquid onto the floor, dramatizing the effect of conflict on them, if that should be my wish. He demonstrated his fearlessness by producing a light-colored liquid and sampling it with enjoyment—as his kind would react to such an encounter.

"Finally I flung out a handful of colored pebbles, displaying the confusing array of languages, races, and ideas their world contains. He scooped them into his pocket, showing that their diversity could still be united into single purpose."

Slan looked contemptuously at the crestfallen faces of his men.

"It would be to our benefit if we had half their spirit in proportion to our size," he said. Then he bellowed,

"Order all ships to withdraw at once!" To an aide he muttered, "We'll leave this planet to those worthy of it."

MIKE and Joe were hiding from a world delirious with joy and anxious to heap glory upon its saviour—whom they thought was Joe Waters. Joe had no intention of deluding the world in this regard, but right now he was plying Mike with whiskey to get from him the story of what

happened.

They were in the rear booth of a bar, and Mike kept insisting that Joe knew perfectly well what had happened because he'd been right there.

"All right," Joe said coaxingly, "I know what happened. But tell me how you're going to tell it, so we can get our stories straight."

"Can't understand it," Mike said thickly, shaking his head. "The guy was nuts."

"What happened?" Joe pleaded. Mike, who apparently had no saturation point, gulped some more whiskey.

"First thing," he said, "the guy sticks his thumb up in the air, like he's gonna give me the bum's rush. So I point mine down—if he tries to kick me outa there before we even get a chance to talk business, I'll floor 'im."

"Yeah, you would."

Mike ignored this comment, took yet another drink and wiped his lips on the back of his hand. Joe watched this display of alcoholic immunity with admiration, and Mike continued.

"Then he takes a bottle of this awful-looking wine and pours it out on the floor.

"No wonder they been raising such a rumpus, Joe. With nothing but that stuff to drink, I would too! So I pulled out my flask and took a swig, to show what *we've* got, and I offer him some. You know something, Joe," and Mike leaned forward earnestly, "when that guy saw the kind of stuff we drink he got a new respect, 'cause he takes a handful of jewels and rolls 'em at me. Now, I don't look no gift horse in the teeth—I pocket 'em as fast as I get my hands on 'em. I got the rocks with me—here."

He pulled out the "pebbles" Slan had referred to—and jewels they were. Fire shot from diamonds, rubies, emeralds, amethysts. Joe whistled.

"We can use the money that stuff will bring."

"Buy a liquor store?" Mike asked eagerly.

"Finance the development and launching of an interplanetary expedition."

"Ah, what the hell you want to do that for?"

"They've got eleven moons," Joe said grimly, "and all we want is one."

THE END

WANTED: YOU—AS A SUBSCRIBER TO IMAGINATION

If you'll turn to page 162 you'll find a BONUS offer that will bring you every copy of *Madge* during the coming year for a low 23c per copy. That's quite a saving for top science fiction enjoyment — so act now!



Cancer Cure!



PROBABLY no medical problem is of more importance than discovering a cure for dreaded cancer. The present technique of killing the malignant cancerous tissues with x-rays (either from a tube or from radium) works perfectly as long as the rays do not have to penetrate healthy tissue. Unfortunately the worst cancers are usually deep-seated. As a result very often good flesh is burned and made cancerous in the process. The cure is worse than the disease.

Recent discoveries in nuclear physics however suggest that there may be hope from this quarter. Neutrons irradiated by fissioning materials, when controlled as to in-

tensity, have the property that they do not injure healthy flesh but do destroy malignant growths! The overall effect of this neutron spray is as if the cancerous growth can be exactly pin-pointed without injury to normal flesh. More than one beam of neutrons from a radioactive source may be used thus catching the diseased tissue in a cross-fire of killing power.

Development of the process will likely be the next great advance in the war on cancer. The major difficulty is obtaining neutrons of the correct intensity. Unless these are had, the neutron beam behaves remarkably like x-rays—with both their good and bad properties.



"If you're through playing with that flying cloud or whatever you call it, how about getting back to work!"

LOVE THAT WOO-WOO!

By
Sherwood' Springer

Steve Haggerty had the toughest assignment of his life trying to break the love mate robot movement. It seemed his girl was part of it! . . .

I*T requires great courage, in the light of our present-day manners and morals, to write or even speculate about the decadent and repulsive love customs of the Twentieth Century. Today, of course, no normal man or wom-*

an would think of even the slightest physical contact with the opposite sex. You men are all familiar, perhaps, with that horrible dream in which you hold a living woman in your arms, or you women, a man. A student of psycho-





analysis could tell you this same dream, two hundred years ago, would have taken the form of finding yourself naked in the street.

Two centuries ago, children were not produced in the laboratory by professional Moms as they are today. According to stories in newspapers of that era, they were born almost anywhere, including department stores, motion picture house rest rooms, and taxicabs. And—shudder if you will—to almost any woman who had the inclination!

In the hall of fame today reposes the bust of a man who, more than any other, was instrumental in revolutionizing our way of living—Dr. Solomon Faw. His monumental creation, the woo-woo, has for generations been an integral facet of our private lives. These mechanical but pseudo-living replicas of desirable men and women have for so long provided each of us with his or her ideal love-mate that we find it difficult today to realize there was once a time when traffic in them was sub rosa.

The historian, however, digging into records of the past, soon discovers scores of incidents that illustrate the turbulence of their development. That embarrassing episode, for example, away back in the Nineteen-Sixties

DOC straightened up, shaking his head wearily. Little Joe smoothed the sweater of the unconscious girl and eased her shoulders back on the sofa.

"Nix, again, eh, Doc? How many's that?"

"Eleven, so far," Doc said, his mind only partially on the question.

Little Joe looked down at the girl in disgust. "You know what I think?" he announced. "I think we're in the wrong business. We oughta switch over to making falsies. Must be a fortune in that racket."

"Hmph," the other grunted, turning toward the door.

"Go ahead, snort. I'm just tryna tell you. They all wear 'em. That's where the money is, Doc. Where you ever gonna find a tomato built like you want?"

"Stop babbling like a moron," Doc said, ignoring his outburst. "Let's get out of here before she wakens."

The pair gained the hall just as sounds of commotion reached them from the front office. They exchanged startled glances, and Little Joe darted off on rabbit-like legs. Doc waited, his brow knit with concern as he regarded the door through which they had come, his ears sharpened for some hint of danger in the disturbance up front, his racing mind preparing to cope

with any contingency.

Scarcely two minutes passed, however, before the frosted glass doors swung toward him, and Little Joe came staggering through bearing the limp figure of a girl. Faces peered over his shoulder, and the chatter of feminine voices followed him through the opening.

As the doors swung shut, cutting the excited babble to a murmur, and indicating no one else was following, Doc's tension eased abruptly.

"What the devil—?" he exclaimed.

"Just one of the tomatoes," Little Joe explained. "Passed out in the line. Heat, probably. Where d'you want her?" He indicated the door just behind the older man. "In there?"

"Are you mad?" Doc said scornfully. "You know better than that. Put her in the studio."

He followed as Little Joe moved off down the hall with his still unconscious burden. "How much did you say out there?" he probed.

"Just told 'em to take it easy. There was a doctor in the house, and I'd get him to fix her up in a jiffy. Picked her up and carried her in. That's all."

Doc nodded his head and pursed his lips. From him it was vast approval.

"Whew," Little Joe breathed, as he deposited the girl on the studio's

rattan sofa and reached up to mop his brow. "Hottest October in seventeen years. Ninety-five again today. No wonder they pass out." His gaze slid back to the outstretched girl and suddenly he froze, his arm still upraised, his eyes widening. "Say—!" he gasped, looking quickly at Doc.

The latter was already appraising the girl, his brows raised in speculation. "Ummm," he approved. "Get the kit. Might as well look her over."

Five minutes later he straightened from his examination. "Mole or two," he commented, "but we'll use her."

Little Joe was holding the mouth of a flexible tube over the girl's nostrils, but his attention was elsewhere. "What a tomato," he breathed. "What a tomato."

"Never mind," Doc snapped. "Let's get moving. First, get rid of that girl in the office. You saw how I handled the others. Be solicitous. And make sure she doesn't spot the vapor vent on the desk." He looked at Little Joe piercingly. "Got it?"

"Like that," the other snapped his fingers.

"Another thing," Doc added. "Tell Elva to keep interviewing the line out there until 4:30. We should be finished matrixing in two hours, and I want everything to look normal when we bring this

girl out of it. And until then no one is to be admitted back here." He took the tube from Little Joe's hand. "Get going."

CAPT. Michael Hanrahan of the Los Angeles vice squad drummed on the surface of his desk with heavy fingers. Smoke billowed from the black cigar jutting from his broad, meaty face, a face now heavy with scowl.

Suddenly he cocked an eye in decision, and dragged his desk phone toward him with much more effort than the move required.

"Send Haggerty in here," he barked into the mechanism, then slapped it back in its cradle.

He was knocking an ash from the cigar when a rangy man with a crew cut and shoulders that threatened to break through his quiet gray suit pushed past the door.

"What's new, Mike?" he said easily.

The captain's scowl did not abate, but evidently it was not directed at the newcomer.

"Sit down, Steve. How much do you know about this woo-woo business?"

"What? . . . Oh, those! Well, I—not much, I guess. Heard something about 'em stirring things up in Miami or some place. I thought it was a lot of hokum."

"Well, for your information,"

Hanrahan said sharply, it's not a lot of hokum. It's the biggest headache the detail's had since the marijuana craze. Not here. Back east. Miami, Detroit, Chicago, New York. The boys' bottoms are dragging, trying to chase 'em down."

"So why should we get in a sweat?"

"I'm trying to tell you, confound it! Last week we got word they were headed for the coast. The papers got the word, too—or don't you read the papers?"

"Well, I—I been pretty busy."

Hanrahan flashed him a scornful look. "So already the churches are raising Cain with the mayor, the mayor's raising Cain with the commission, the commission's raising Cain with the department, and see if you can figure who'll get the boot if we don't run these babies out of town before they get a foothold here!"

"What's stopping us?"

The captain exhaled in disgust and slumped back in his chair. He took a minute to grind out his cigar.

"Well, for one thing," he growled, "we haven't even seen a woo-woo. That's where you come in. I've had Grimes and Kelly on the case since Tuesday and so far—"

"Kelly!" Haggerty suddenly shot from his chair as if jabbed with a pin. "Which Kelly?"

Hanrahan didn't turn a hair. "Pat Kelly," he said, with a show of innocence. "Miss Kelly to you."

Steve closed his eyes and his fingernails dug into his palms.

"'Miss Kelly to you,' he says."

He lunged forward, planted his hands on the desk, and leaned toward Hanrahan.

"Chief, you can't do this to me," he blustered. "You know how Pat and I feel about each other. We're going to be married next spring. But working on the same case with her is absolutely out! I told you that before. Every time you team us together all hell breaks loose, and I end up like a busted connecting rod. Remember the Melrose job? And that business on the Strip? I'd rather transfer to the fire department. I'll—"

"Haggerty!" Hanrahan's voice boomed out like a forty-five. "Sit down and shut up. That's an order." As Steve's jaws clamped shut, the captain continued. "You probably won't even see Pat on this deal. She's working from the other end. All I want you to do is be out on Wilshire tonight and accept delivery on a woo-woo. We've got to get our hands on one of these contraptions so we know what we're up against. Grimes has made some connections, and you're going to be one of the first customers in L. A."

BACK and forth across the living room of one of the deluxe bungalow annexes of the famous Hotel Embassy on Wilshire Boulevard, Steve Haggerty paced impatiently. Why in blazes had he let Hanrahan maneuver him into this deal? He loved Patricia Kelly, and when they were married and she quit police work they could be very happy. But as a police-woman she was hell on wheels. Working with her on a case meant holding your breath and wondering where calamity would strike first. How many times had he sworn—

He halted suddenly. Was that a tap on the door? The sound was repeated, and Steve opened it. A man short enough to be a Santa Anita jockey was grinning up at him.

"You Howard Smith of Arizona?" he asked.

"That's me," Steve affirmed. "You got something?"

"Could be," the little man said, his quick eyes darting to the bedroom door. "Mind if I come in and look around?"

Steve raised no objection and waited until the other had made a quick search of the apartment.

"We can't take no chances," he explained, returning from his search. "You got the dough, Smith?"

Steve tapped his breast pocket.

"I'm prepared to write you a check for five thousand on my Los Angeles account. Bring her in."

"A check?"

"Hell, man," Steve grinned disarmingly, "your boss must've looked me up. I've got enough silver and copper in Arizona to buy half this town. If my check's no good let's forget the whole deal." He turned as if about to dismiss the matter.

"Ok, ok," the other agreed hurriedly, although not without a trace of doubt in his voice. "I'll be back." He scurried out into the night.

A second man was helping him carry a tall wooden box when they returned five minutes later. They maneuvered their burden through the doorway and deposited it upright against the wall.

"Whew!" the little man wheezed. "They get heavier all the time." He wiped his brow, then threw a quick glance at his helper. "Get back and keep an eye on that truck."

Steve, uncapping his pen, seated himself at the writing desk. "Who do I make this out to?"

"You tryna be funny?" the little man retorted. "Jever hear a guy name Cash?"

Steve looked up, realized it would seem suspicious if he pushed the matter, and began to write.

He blotted the check and gestured toward the box. "How's it operate?"

"Book's in the box," the little man said as he pocketed the check. "Don't take no imagination at all to find the place to plug in a cord when you wanna recharge her. Have fun." The door opened and closed again, and the little man was gone.

Haggerty sat there for some time, profoundly disgusted with his job, with Hanrahan, and with himself. He had detected the ghost of a smirk on the other's face as it disappeared out the door—and that parting crack made his face burn. Meet Howard Smith, he thought, six foot two, a hundred and eighty-five, as good looking as the next guy and, on top of that, supposed to be knee-deep in dough. . . and he can't get a dame! He has to sneak out and buy a blasted window dummy imitation. Damn this job, anyway. It made him look like a fool—or worse. No wonder the guy smirked.

With a start, he realized he'd been gazing at the upright case for some minutes. He got up abruptly and took the distance in three quick strides. He might as well look it over, at least. Maybe they'd been hooked. Hanrahan would blow his top if they'd gone to all this trouble for a box of junk.

His hand found the catch, and he jerked open the lid.

STEVE Haggerty's hand, his jaw, and his heart dropped simultaneously in that one stunning moment.

His move had been executed so quickly and impulsively it was doubtful if his mind had had time to frame a picture of what he expected to see within the box. Subconsciously, of course, he assumed it contained what he had given a phony check for—a woo-woo—and his conception of a woo-woo was something on the order of the wax dummies he had seen at the World's Fair.

The shock, therefore, that his eyes sent careening into his brain, almost rocked him to his heels.

For the creature within the case was anything but a wax dummy. She was alive. Her soft auburn hair was real, her wide-spaced green eyes, her pert little Irish nose, her firm red lips. Her figure, outlined by her smartly styled casual dress of fine wool jersey, was a provocative 35-24-34. She was, in short, the very girl Steve dreamed about.

His clabbered tongue got free at last.

"Pat!" he gasped.

But the image of Patricia Kelly, pride of the Police Department, would have none of his recognition. Her eyes, glowing with a peculiar frozen fire, held a focus somewhere about six inches behind

his head. Her jaw muscles, too, were strangely taut, and Steve, under other circumstances, might have guessed she was doing a slow burn.

"My God, Pat," he began again. "Say something. How'd you get in there?"

This time a spark of cunning flickered in the girl's eyes that Steve was too numb to detect. Her arms began to raise slowly, as if with an independent life of their own, and her lips parted in a smile that, somehow, didn't seem to involve the remainder of her face. She took a step toward him, her arms outstretched.

"How about some lovin', honey?" she murmured in an absurd travesty of eager passion. "Would you like some fun, you great big hunk of man?"

Astonishment rooted Steve's feet to the floor for a moment, then he began to back off rapidly, his eyes popping in bewilderment. "What is this?" he stalled. "What's the matter with you?"

As he retreated, the girl pursued him step by step around and behind various pieces of furniture in a preposterous inversion of the timeworn tycoon - and - secretary scene.

"Now, wait a minute, Pat," he kept protesting, one arm outstretched to ward her off, "come off it. What the—"

"Want some lovin', honey?" she repeated in that impossible voice. "A little fun, honey?"

The comedy progressed to its inevitable climax. Carefully maneuvering Steve to a point where a chair stood directly behind him, the girl sprang suddenly.

Steve's escape reflexes were quick—and disastrous. His legs caught the chair in mid-leap and he pitched over backward. His hundred and eighty-five pounds struck the floor with a crash that shook the building.

The blow on his head was sharp, and as Steve tried to sit up he discovered the room had taken on a foggy appearance. As he tried to collect his wits, he became aware of one thing. Some babe was standing in front of him on stiff, wide-spread legs. Her fists were on her hips and her elbows out like a fishwife's. And she was not cooing.

"Serves you right, you two-timing Mick," she squalled. "Not even a self-respecting tw6-timer. You don't have guts enough to cheat with a real live girl. You have to sneak around and buy a cheap imitation!"

There was more of the same, much more. A woman in anger can say any one thing with a hundred variations—and usually does. It took Steve, after he got to his feet, a full ten minutes to quiet

her, and another ten minutes to convince her he was on the case at Hanrahan's orders, and not there to taste the embraces of a woo-woo.

"All right," she said grudgingly. "So you had those two with the goods. Why didn't you snap the cuffs on them?"

"Goods," Steve snorted. "What goods, Nobody'd be dumb enough to mistake *you* for a woo-woo. Besides, Hanrahan said no pinches. He had a tail planted outside. That truck ought to lead us right to their hangout."

Pat sniffed lightly. "I just came from there."

IT was her turn to do some explaining, and Steve listened.

"Brother, this woo-woo outfit's slick," she began. "They work it so girls model for free—and without the models even suspecting they've been used. Wait'll you hear. I got my first lead from an ad in the Citizen-News." She fished a fragment of a classified page from her pocket and handed it over. One announcement was circled in pencil.

MODELS WANTED

\$1000 Per Week

We want the ten most beautiful faces and figures in Hollywood for new advertising campaign. Call in person Thursday, 9 to 5.

It listed an address on La Cie-

nega Blvd. above Wilshire, in a rather plush-class business area.

Steve handed it back. "So—?" he prompted.

"It's a phony," Pat went on. "A thousand a week for models? Phooey.

"I got there about 8:45, and you should have seen the line. As we moved toward the interviewing desk an inch at a time, I noticed every now and then a girl would be sent through a swinging door in the back. Ten or fifteen minutes later she'd come out again and leave for the street. The third time it happened I decided I could find out more from her than staying in line, so I ducked out, caught her on the sidewalk, and in a few minutes we were having coffee together.

"The deal sounded phonier all the time. The girl told me she'd gone in and some man had left her alone in a little room to fill out a questionnaire. She started to write, and then *fainted!* When she came to, she was lying on a sofa and the man was apologizing about the heat.

"We finished our coffee, and I hurried back to the line. When the next girl came out I caught her, too. Except this time, since it was after eleven, I offered to buy her lunch. Her story was just like the other's. She had passed out, too.

"When I got back into line after lunch I started figuring how to get through that door. The chances of just being picked were pretty slim. A lot of really lovely girls were there, and only a handful were making the grade. You know how hot it was yesterday afternoon. After standing for two hours only four girls were ahead of me, and I knew I'd have to work fast. So I just gave a gasp and pulled a faint.

"As I hit the floor, the catch on my bag scraped my leg and I felt a run pop in my brand new nylons. Then there was a lot of excitement for a minute. Some man hustled up and said something about a doctor. He picked me up and carried me inside, and soon somebody was holding something to my nose.

"It wasn't smelling salts, as anyone would expect. It was sweetish. Two whiffs of it and I was out like a light, really out. Those other girls had been out for maybe five minutes or so. Not me. Steve, it was 4:15 when I came to. I'd been unconscious more than two hours!

"The first thing I saw was this amazing man bending over me. He must have been 55 or 60 and built sort of roly poly, but with the most innocent baby face and the strangest blue eyes. His hair was snow white and curly like kara-

cul. He said he hoped I was feeling better, but was sorry I wasn't the type of model they were looking for.

"That was that. When I got back to my car, I remembered the run and glanced down at my stocking. *It wasn't there!*"

"The stocking?"

"The run! I knew I hadn't been dreaming. I could still feel the zip it made along my right leg. I checked the other one then, just for good measure, and my eyes really popped out. It was there, all right—in my left one!"

Steve's lip curled with impatience. "So you just made a mistake. Skip this junk about nylons. What I want to know is how you —"

"I didn't make a mistake! The run was in my right stocking. When I came to, it was in my left. There's only one answer. Someone must have taken them off."

"Who the devil would do that?"

"Nobody, probably . . . unless they were taking everything else off, too."

"Well, what I'd like to—" Steve began, then his eyes widened incredulously. "What!"

"I mean they must have had me stripped in that place for two hours."

HAGGERTY stalked the room and raged for five minutes be-

fore Pat could quiet him down to the point where she could finish her story.

Her conclusion regarding the nylons, she decided, was worth nothing as evidence. So she drove to the next street, turned right, and then cut into a narrow service alley that lay behind the buildings on La Cienega. She discovered a loading platform in the rear, and impressed the layout on her memory.

Late that night she returned, parked her car two blocks away, and made her way into the shadowed alley. The building was not deserted. Light seeped around the edges of the opaque window drapes, and muted sounds came faintly from within, but despite her best efforts she was unable to see or hear anything to indicate the nature of the mysterious activity.

Pat returned to her car and dozed for several hours. On making a second trip, she concluded whoever was working in the place planned to make an all-night job of it. Frustrated for the time being, she returned home, with dawn only two hours away.

"I spent part of today," she went on, "trying to get some dope on the Pacificoast Enterprises who rented the premises two weeks ago. This afternoon I drove out there again and hung around until

dark. The front door was closed and there was no sign of life that I could see.

"Just after dark I got my break. A pair of headlights stopped in the alley and flicked off. I hurried back there and found a covered truck had backed up to the loading platform. The driver had already gone into the building, and the door was ajar. I waited and listened. Then, ready to jump on a second's notice, I tiptoed up on the platform, edged over to the door and looked in. I could hear voices up front but I couldn't see a thing. Now or never, I thought, and slipped inside."

"That was a cockeyed move," Steve put in. "Why didn't you get some help?"

She silenced him and went on. "I saw right away why it was so dark in the back. The room was one of those long ones they cut into parts by a couple of partitions that run only half way to the ceiling. The only light was up front, and it was pretty dim where I was. The partitions had open doorways in the middle and with no one in sight I slipped into the next room.

"Then I heard this babe talking. For a minute I thought I'd stumbled into somebody's love nest. 'How about some lovin', honey?' she was saying. 'How about a little—'"

"That sounds like—" Steve in-

terrupted, then brightened, "hey, that's the gag you were feeding me!"

"Oh, Steve," Pat said, with wasted sarcasm, "you're so sharp."

HAGGERTY grinned ruefully and rubbed the back of his head. "What a corny act," he sniffed. "Go on."

"Then I heard this doctor's voice. 'She'll have to do,' he said. 'Cut her off.' His next words scared me stiff. 'Put three on the truck and get moving. Here are the addresses.'"

"I looked around in a panic. I knew I'd never make it to the back door in time to get away. There was no closet, cupboard or any place to hide. Just a row of ten or twelve tall boxes standing against the wall. I ripped open the door of one, and my heart turned a somersault and landed in my throat. *A girl was in the box!*

"Lord, what a feeling! Then I heard steps coming through the doorway. My brain was numb, but my hands must have worked automatically. I closed the lid and opened the next one and jumped in.

"If that one hadn't been empty, they'd have caught me. Before I got the lid altogether shut they were already in the room. But for a minute, at least, I was safe,

and it was only then I realized the gal in the next case must be a woo-woo."

Pat paused to smile in secret amusement, deciding Hot-Headed Haggerty needn't know everything. *Brother, you don't know how beautiful that gal was.*

"That's about it," she finished. "How they happened to pick the box I was in, I'll never know. Just one of those things, I guess. I heard them carry two out, and I was next. The truck started, and I decided there was nothing to do but go along with the gag. I knew somebody would be due for a jolt when I was delivered. Then, out of two million people in this town, I hear *your* ever-lovin' voice! Did I burn!"

"Well, let's forget it," Steve said, getting up and sweeping the room with a glance. "And let's get out of here. I've got to make a report."

At Pat's request, he drove her out Wilshire to La Cienega where she retrieved her car. On the way they took a turn around the woo-woo plant, but it was in complete darkness.

After Pat had started off for headquarters, Steve located a phone booth and called Hanrahan.

The captain was fuming. What idiot had tipped their hand? Moran had just phoned in. The truck driver had wised up somehow and ditched him at an all-night garage

on Ninth Street. Just drove in one end and out the other, and there was Moran sitting outside on his tokus. What the blazes kind of—

Steve managed to squeeze in a word, then Hanrahan cut him off. "Never mind your story. Bring that woo-woo in here."

"I'm trying to tell you, chief. We didn't get one."

This time Haggerty had to hold the receiver a foot from his ear as Hanrahan let loose a string of scalding Skid Row epithets. He ran down eventually, and Steve was able to give him an account of the night's work. "Pat's on her way in now with the complete dope," he finished. Hanrahan grunted several times and told him to go home and go to bed.

WHEN Steve checked in at 4 o'clock the next afternoon he found orders had been left for him by Hanrahan to run down rumors of a woo-woo in Boyle Heights. He spent three fruitless hours on the East Side and returned with nothing to report but a wild goose chase. The captain was still out, but Steve found another message awaiting him. This time the information was explicit and the source a reliable tipster. A woo-woo had been installed in a Skid Row burlesque house, and Haggerty's instructions were couch-

ed in no uncertain terms.

Steve reached the corner of Fifth and Main Streets just after 8:30, an hour when activity began to pick up in that tarnished section of Los Angeles. Skid Row is not unlike a lady of the streets long past her prime. By day, she is waiting, drab and colorless, but as night falls to hide her pallor, forlorn hope stirs once again, new rouge, new lipstick appear, and activity is revived in mimicry of a far-gone blossoming era.

Skid Row. In another metropolis it might bear a different name, but always someone would call it "where they go, brother, when they hit the skids." The winos, the failures, the once-greats whose world has crumbled. Sailors and slummers looking for excitement. Pawn shops and pool rooms, flop-houses and missions, hash houses and gin joints. Tinsel, rouge and shadows.

Steve made his way south along the street. The burlesque house, one of a handful in the area, was flanked on one side by a crowded bar, noisy with a juke box, and on the other by a tight driveway, beyond which was a shooting gallery and a nondescript row of shops. On the window of one, Steve saw the familiar sign of a blood bank station: "EARN \$4.00!" This was the white beacon of the wino, the emergency port where he could sell a little

life to buy a little living. A pint of blood . . . two gallons of wine. A bleak cycle sliding in ever-tightening spirals toward a monotonously inevitable ending.

Steve ignored the line of servicemen who were stalling and wise-cracking with the blonde in the ticket booth. He made directly for the entrance, brushed past the ticket-taker as if he didn't exist, and was already inside before a rough hand on his arm jerked him sharply around.

"Hey, you! Where you think you're goin'?"

Haggerty turned, shook his arm free and flipped open his left lapel as he glared coldly down at the hard-jawed employee.

"Who's stopping me?"

The other's belligerence faded immediately. "Oh," he grunted. "Why didn't you—?"

"Never mind that. How do I get backstage?"

"Door down the side there. But the show *bin* OK'd. You won't find any—"

But Steve was already striding out of earshot, down the left-hand aisle. The house was full, and a medley of catcalls and whistles almost drowned out the low humor of the two comedians onstage as a slinky skirted redhead snaked her way across the boards. No one glanced at Haggerty.

HE went through the door, took the five steps in two, and shouldered his way past a group of fantastically costumed showgirls waiting for their cue. He collared a pimply faced youth carrying a papier mache fire hydrant under his arm.

"Who runs things back here?" he growled, flashing his badge.

"Not me, Sarge," the kid flipped. "Try dressing room C." His head bent toward the stairs. "Down that way."

Steve found a double row of dressing rooms beneath the stage and hesitated slightly when he reached the one bearing a tarnished metal "C". Deciding maybe a knock *would* be in order, he banged on the panel once, and opened the door.

Two persons were standing in the middle of the tiny room. Light from a naked bulb in the ceiling was reflected from the bald dome of a heavy-set man whose bulk partly concealed the girl standing beyond him, her back to both him and the door. The man's head was turning and his hands dropping, and Steve had a fleeting impression he had been doing something to the girl's hair as the door opened.

The heavy man scowled. "What is this?" he bristled. "You can't come busting in here like—"

"Save it, bud," Steve said easily.

"I've already busted in. All I want is—"

Then he saw the girl, and all thought of his mission was lost.

She had turned languorously at the sound of his voice and was flowing toward him, entirely oblivious of the bald-headed man at her side. Steve, for a moment, was unaware she was clad in only a pair of B-cups and a rhinestone G-string.

He was out on his feet. This was nightmare. His brain fought mightily to grasp some straw of reality in this sea of phantasy. The girl was approaching him as if in some oft-recurrent dream, her arms outstretched, her eyes glowing, her words the same old familiar, "You want some lovin', honey?"

The heavy man suddenly pushed between her and the dream-logged Haggerty. "Look here," he blustered, "I don't know what you —" It was enough to break the spell.

"Pat!"

Steve's bellow of incredulity would have done credit to Hanrahan himself. With his eyes still glued on the girl's face, one of his ham-like hands shot out and sent the theater man careening toward the wall.

In that moment the lusciously nubile duplicate of Patricia Kelly was upon him, her arms twining

about his neck, her lips questing for his.

"Cut it out, Pat, for God's sake," he protested, trying to free himself. Realizing suddenly then the extent of her attire, he flushed a brick color. "What the blazes—? Haven't you any decency? Where are your clothes?" He began to look around the room wildly.

The other man was pulling himself to his feet, glowering. "You can't do this. I'll have the police —"

Haggerty swiveled his head awry. "I *am* the police, you pinhead," he roared. "Get out of here."

THE girl was clinging to his neck tenaciously. "A little lovin', honey?" she cooed. Steve's soaring temper and sagging patience were almost at collision point. "If I hear that line once more I'll —" His eyes had suddenly spotted a spangled robe hanging from a hook near the door. He lunged toward it, dragging the other with him. "Here," he exclaimed, "this'll have to do. I don't know how you got into this dump but I know how you're getting out!"

"No!" the bald man wailed. "She's part of the act. You can't —"

"You still here?" Haggerty snarled. "Want your teeth knocked in? I said hit your feet. Get

lost." His big Irish fists knotted, and the other, cringing at the gesture, retreated eel-like through the doorway.

The girl, on her part, proved anything but cooperative—as far as Steve's intentions were concerned, at last. She seemed to have objectives of her own.

"Are you completely nuts?" he shouted, as he grabbed her shoulders and shook her roughly. "I've had enough of this cockeyed act. Now snap out of it! Get this robe on!" He pried one of her arms loose and managed to stuff it into the armhole of the garment. Much wrestling and grunting, on his part, followed before the enrobing process was completed. By that time, Steve was breathless and fuming.

Snatching her up roughly, he shoved his foot in the door and kicked it back on its hinges. Down the hall he stalked with his burden and mounted the stairs, raging to push someone's teeth in, just anyone.

The girls were doing a number onstage to the red-hot cadence of "I Made a Pass at a Lass in Mass, but Married a Gal in Cal." One of the comedians was leaning against the wall just under the "NO SMOKING" sign, studying the racing form as he dragged on a cigarette. A luscious stripper stood in the wings awaiting her cue,

while near the head of the stairs a group of three—Baldy, another man and the kid—were talking and gesticulating against the din of the music.

Whether they had intended to block his path, Steve never found out. He brushed past them like a fullback with his goal ahead. "Out of my way!"

Baldy's mouth opened to protest, a strip-teaser turned to give him a curious glance, and even the comedian pulled his eyes off the fourth race to regard him enigmatically. The girl in Steve's arms, meanwhile, was engrossed in kissing him passionately below his right ear, and his face was beginning to turn purple. "Lemme hear one peep out of anybody," he bellowed, trying to vent his fury on the spectators, "and he'll get ten years!"

His tone held so much brimstone no finger was raised to stop him. Heads swiveled silently as all eyes followed his progress to the door with the neon "EXIT" above it.

Outside, Steve lost no time in the narrow alley leading to the street. As he approached the sidewalk he paused in the shadow of the building, poked his head around the corner and looked up and down.

Beads of perspiration started crowding out on his forehead as frustration suddenly added to his

confusion of anger and embarrassment. "Where the blazes is Dolan with that goddam cruiser?" he snarled. Pat Kelly was, after all, his fiancée, and he wasn't going to parade her all over Skid Row in a bathrobe. Dolan had dropped him a block away and had agreed to be on hand when he brought out the woo-woo. There was no sign of the police car.

The girl brought her head around to seek his lips, and he was suddenly looking into her eyes at close range. There was an indefinable glassiness about them that gave Steve a chill. "My God," he gasped, as the light of understanding dawned, "she's drugged." He flung a withering scowl over his shoulder toward the stage door. "Somebody'll pay for this!"

BUT getting Pat out of Skid Row came first, and Haggerty acted in quick decision. He had spotted a police call box down the street on the opposite side. Dropping the girl's feet to the ground, he straightened her up against the building well within the shadow. "Wait right here, darling," he reassured. "Don't move. I'll only take a minute."

Releasing her quickly, he dashed out and started to sprint for the call box. Then everything began to happen at once. With a screech of brakes, an old Buick

sedan came to a shuddering halt directly in his path, the driver staring past him open-mouthed. Almost simultaneously a Ford coupe hit the rear of the Buick with a splintering crash, and another car piled into the Ford. Wolf whistles began to split the air and there was the jostle of hurrying feet.

"Now what the devil?" Steve thought exasperatingly. He shot a ferocious glare at the driver of the Buick as he maneuvered around it, and had just reached the opposite curb when the rising babble behind him forced him to waste a backward glance.

The sight turned his blood to ice water. Pat had followed him to the sidewalk and was already surrounded by a rapidly growing crowd of sailors and street characters, with more hurrying up from both directions. The reason for the commotion, moreover, was appallingly apparent. The girl had taken off her robe!

And at the moment, Steve noted in horror, she was standing there blandly attempting to unhook the catch of her bra, while four or five servicemen were chanting with rousing enthusiasm the old standby of Minsky U.: "Take it off, take it off, take it off!"

"PATRICIA!"

He thundered her name in a voice that could be heard all the

way to the theater district. "Wait!" With a great leap he cleared the bumpers between two stalled cars and charged back toward the melee. "Break it up, *break it up!*" he roared, as he plunged through the bystanders, sending them staggering right and left.

Haggerty's plain clothes, however, gave no indication of his authority, and just as he reached the girl's side and was making a dive for the fallen robe, a muscular hand clamped him on the shoulder. He straightened in a flash, his Irish blood singing for action.

Facing him was a strapping soldier, chir-jutting. "Who do you think you are, mister?" the latter demanded. "Leave the babe alone."

The words were like a trigger that set off Steve's long pent-up explosion. He swung a long right at the craggy jaw.

IT was the last he remembered for a time. Some pile-driver must have hit him out of nowhere. When the fog cleared he found himself on his back on the pavement, his face numb as if he'd been shot full of novocaine. His coat lay open and his badge was reflecting the glow of the theater marquee. The gawking and elbowing crowd was still around him but the big soldier and his buddies were nowhere in sight. As Steve clambered to his feet, a blue-coated

patrolman pushed through to his side.

"McCarthy!" the detective groaned. "Where in blazes you been?" He wheeled then, suddenly remembering Pat. She was ten feet away, almost concealed by a knot of wise-cracking men.

"It's Pat Kelly," he flung at the cop. "Drugged. Bust it up." He dove toward the group, two steps ahead of the ponderous McCarthy.

The advent of the law had some effect, but Skid Row characters give ground reluctantly. Steve, however, succeeded in getting the girl back into her robe and then, pinioning her arms, he shouted for McCarthy.

"Forget 'em a minute, Mac," he barked. "Hold her till I ring in. She don't know what she's doing."

The patrolman, still slightly nonplussed, took over, and Steve raced once more toward the call box. Traffic by this time was tied up a half block each way. Horns were blaring impatiently in a welter of different keys.

As Haggerty reached the call box and made the connection, a new roar of hilarity burst from across the street. Half-fearfully, he risked a look. Then his eyes rolled up with a word to a patron saint.

The crowd was howling with merriment. The sputtering McCarthy, his face beet-red, was

struggling desperately to stave off the amorous advances of the girl as she tried to plaster his face with kisses. With a mighty heave, he shook her off at last and backed away, looking helplessly for Steve. The girl, finding her arms unpinioned, stood there motionless for a second. Then her hands moved quickly, and Haggerty caught the flash of white shoulders.

Off came the robe.

Steve, in a frenzy, howled for the wagon, ten wagons, and slammed shut the box.

His next jolt was worst of all. Two men had been hurrying up and were passing him at that instant. A snatch of exclamation reached him, "My God, it's Pat Kelly, the policewom—", and they were gone. But Haggerty gulped as recognition remained. Reporters!

This was the final blow. He could see the front pages. "DRUNK, NAKED POLICEWOMAN CAUSES SKID ROW RIOT." His Patricia Kelly. His bride-to-be. Steve's brain reeled.

HE was running again. Over the din of auto horns, shouts and catcalls he heard sirens screaming toward them down the left side of Main Street. Dimly he felt that this phase of the nightmare, at least, would soon be over.

What comfort there was in the

thought vanished immediately. Fighting his way through the mob, he caught sight of the approaching vehicles. Bright red. Two pumpers and a hook-and-ladder. Some idiot had turned in a fire alarm.

Tears of desperation dimmed his vision. With redoubled savagery he tore through the milling crowd. He reached the girl's side at the same instant a sudden surge carried the weight of numbers crushing into the metal grillwork guarding a pawn shop window next door. The iron bellied inward and a circuit closed. There was a shattering crash of glass and immediately a burglar alarm added its deafening clangor to the bedlam.

And bedlam it was by this time. Fights had broken out on the fringes of the mob, while in the center a tightly jammed mass of booze-sprinkled humanity heaved and surged helplessly this way and that, scarcely able to raise an arm. Steve's flesh began to crawl as he thought of the vermin-infested clothing that must be pressing close against Pat's bare skin. Wagon or no wagon, he had to get her out of here fast. Holding her arm with one hand, he tried to crouch down to look for the robe, but it had long ago disappeared somewhere under the hundreds of shuffling feet. Somebody's knee banged his already swollen jaw and stars floated before his eyes. He

was on the point of rising in despair when an astounding thing happened.

Someone's flailing elbow struck a certain spot directly behind the girl's right ear. It was not a sharp blow but its results were more startling than ju-jitsu. Her arms suddenly dropped to her sides, her face went blank, her back straightened, and she stood there as rigid and motionless as a steel girder.

Steve felt her arm fall like a semaphore. He pushed himself to his feet and stared in blank astonishment at her immobile face and sightless eyes.

"Pat Pat!" he cried. "What's wrong? Say something. Say something!" His hands reached for her and then recoiled in cold horror as they felt her marble-like stiffness.

"My God," he gasped. "Rigor mortis."

A curtain of red rage filmed his eyes. Curses streamed from his throat. His girl. His Patricia Kelly. Killed by a pack of murdering wolves. Fury blinded him. Berserk, he turned and tore into the wall of men about him, clawing and roaring like a ravening beast.

Not for long. From somewhere behind him a ragged-sleeved arm shot skyward, then down. A lead pipe gripped in a grimy hand thudded into his skull. In a maelstrom

of colored lights, burglar alarms, sirens, horns and fire bells, Steve went down, pitching into a roaring pit of blackness.

CLANGING burglar alarms at one end of his timeless orbit merged into jangling telephone bells at the other. The transition was confusing. Dimly, through glazed eyes set in a head that felt as big as a bass drum, Steve could make out the bulky form of Hanrahan behind his desk, one phone gripped to his ears while two more rang insistently.

"It's a lie!" the captain was barking at someone. "Kelly's been right here for two hours." He cut the connection with a huge thumb, slammed the receiver on his desk, and snatched up the second one. "Yeah. Yeah." His eyes began to widen. "He did? . . . They did?

. . . She did?" he winced visibly, mumbled something and hung up. His hand crept numbly to the remaining phone still jangling. "Yeah," he said, then briskly, "Yes, sir . . ." a phrase he repeated six times before the call was concluded. Then, with all three receivers off their hooks, he stalked around the desk.

Haggerty became dimly aware of someone else in the room. Patricia Kelly. Alive, and grinning as she approached him with a glass full of liquid. How could—?

Hanrahan was talking again. "We'll never live this down. First the raid today and now this. All we got was some empty crates. And the fish that got away was the biggest in the racket . . . guy named Faw. Lock, stock, and us holding the barrel. Plus what's left of a woo-woo.

"But that isn't what I got to say. There must be more of those things, and if they all look like you the word'll spread a police-woman's working in hot spots all over L. A." He winced to himself and started pacing. "Kelly, I got to get you out of town. You're gonna leave the force in a few months, anyway, so getting out now won't be much of a blow. I'd like to get rid of that big ape Haggerty at the same time, but I'd only have to put a bigger ape in his place."

Steve, still dazed, opened his mouth to protest, but Pat had reached him and was putting the drink to his lips.

"So, as of right now," Hanrahan went on, "Haggerty's got three weeks' leave, on condition you both get the hell out of town tonight."

Pat got Steve to his feet and led him toward the door. As they reached the hall, the captain fired a parting shot. "Take him to Vegas. Maybe marriage'll put some sense in his head."

But there was no indication he had been heard. Down the corridor Patricia was pulling Steve along and cooing up at him impishly:

"Want some lovin', honey?"

It is, of course, a matter of historical record that Dr. Solomon Faw was not apprehended by the authorities of his time. And fortunate indeed it is that such a catastrophe was averted. For without Faw's initial genius our glorious woo-woo age would never have dawned. It must be admitted, however, that the appealing perfection of his first woo-woos was

in no small part responsible for the success of the movement in the latter part of the 20th century. And while Patricia Kelly lived an obscured, but "normal" life, (according to the ancient standards) marrying the misguided obstructionist, Steve Haggerty, she is today immortalized in the archives of our national museum in the person of the original matrix made of her by Dr. Faw. One of the first of millions of woo-woos to follow, her beauty is still a tribute to that era, turbulent as it was in its lack of foresight in social progress.

THE END

COMING NEXT MONTH:---

THE TIME ARMADA

By

FOX B. HOLDEN

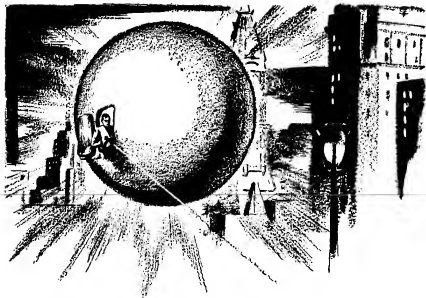
There's an old saying that rules are made to be broken. While IMAGINATION has not had a "no serial" rule, we have been against using them unless a truly terrific book-length novel came along. Well, it finally has—so the "rule" is hereby shelved! Whatever you do, don't miss this great two-part serial, beginning next month.—And accompanying the novel will be a new Smith Interstellar PHOTO COVER! A double-barreled treat? You bet it is!

— and in the November issue the big news is:

SKY LIFT

By

ROBERT A. HEINLEIN



JEFF Engel studied the feverish crowd hurrying through the subway turnstiles. As he checked each passing face against a card-index mind, he smiled to himself. Even when off duty, the habit persisted. There was always the chance he'd spot a face that would fit, one that would close another active file in Missing Persons Bureau.

A mousey little guy slipped through a turnstile and bumped into a fat woman shopper. Engel glanced at the thin apologetic face and then at a briefcase bearing the faded initials, "C. G." As a train rumbled in and the noise of the

commuters rose, something glinted at Engel's feet. He bent down, curious.

It was a cheap fountain pen inscribed with the same initials. He caught a glimpse of the stranger on the crowded subway stairs.

"Wait a minute, mister!" he yelled.

When C. G. didn't turn, Engel hesitated, then pounded up the stairs into dazzling sunlight. He squinted around at people and then over low bushes into the city park where he saw the little fellow walking briskly. Annoyed, Engel trotted down a shady walk, then down a quiet lane and finally

THE FUGITIVES

By

Malcolm B. Morehart, Jr.

Somehow Jeff Engel followed the stranger into another world—among people who hated all aliens. And of course, he was now one himself!



reached out to tap his shoulder.

C. G. vanished in thin air.

Engel slid to a halt and rubbed his eyes. Fearfully he explored this queer illusion, his hands pawing nothingness. There was a roar like a thousand subway trains, and something invisible and powerful hurled him sprawling. He lay stunned as the noise died away and then sat up to nurse a bruised head.

Someone grabbed his arms, jerked him rudely to his feet, and spun him around. A tall gangling cop glared down at him.

"You been drinking?"

"W-what?" Engel stammered. Confused, he looked more closely at this man who wore a gray metallic uniform, a glittering badge, and an oddly shaped holster. "I wasn't drinking. Something pushed me . . ."

The cop smirked as he picked up the fountain pen and dusted it off with his gloves. "This yours?" he asked.

"Yes—uh, why, no," Engel sputtered. "It belongs to a guy I was chasing."

The cop's thick eyebrows lifted.

"He lost it, and I was trying to return it," Engel explained. "But he disappeared right in front of me!"

"Well, that's a new one," the cop said with a cynical smile. He seized Engel's arm and dragged

him down the walk. "I'm running you in as a drunk and robbery suspect, bud."

"But I didn't do anything!" protested Engel.

The cop scowled. "We'll see. If you're innocent, you'll get out of C. D. in a few minutes."

"C. D.?" Engel echoed. C. D.? C. G.? C. D.? The initials hopped wildly about in his mind. At a soft whistling sound he glanced up above a high hedge and his eyes widened. Gleaming white towers rose up to fade into misty blue, and around them silently darted silvery bubbles. Faintly traced with jointed, concentric lines, the sky seemed to curve over him like a lofty and enormous spider web.

As he was pulled across a wide street, tall, hollow-cheeked people stopped to stare at him, and he stared back in wonder.

"Who are they?" Engel faltered.

The cop said nothing and led him through the low entrance of a tower. As they went down a glowing hall, Engel touched the back of his still aching head. Was his fall in the park causing these hallucinations? Possibly. But before the fall, hadn't some mysterious, unseen force thrown him into this crazy world? Then he had to find it again and somehow escape back to reality!

THEY entered a large room where lines of gaunt, solemn people stood gravely before grill windows. *The Enemy is Listening!* a sign on a wall warned him as a loudspeaker blared out a garbled message. The cop shoved him into a line. Finally the man ahead of them fidgeted up to an ugly, hatchet-faced woman who frowned impatiently.

"Yes?" she snapped.

"My wife deserted me," the scarecrow of a man complained. "I want to—"

"Fill out this form, drop it in slot 9," she rapped out. "Next?"

"A drunk and robbery suspect," the cop said. "Here's the evidence."

Brightening, Hatchet-Face snatched up the fountain pen and whisked out a blue card. "Misdemeanor and felony," she breathed sharply. "I'll take the details."

Engel clung to the edge of the window counter as the interrogation began.

Yes, he told them, he actually believed something invisible had knocked him down after swallowing up the stranger. No, he hadn't robbed the stranger, he wasn't confessing anything. Yes, he was an honest citizen with no previous criminal offenses. After more probing questions and vicious jabs at the form, she handed it to the cop who dropped it in a nearby wall slot. They waited for a ver-

dict.

In a moment the cop turned to Hatchet-Face who whispered with him excitedly. Flushed and triumphant, he steered Engel out into the hall. "Alien Detection wants you," he growled with uneasy respect.

THEY got into an elevator and shot swiftly upward. As they stepped into a lavish reception room filled with sickeningly sweet perfume, a scrawny, over-rouged girl shut a magazine and jumped to a switchboard. Then a door opened, and a short, puffy man with cold fish-eyes bounced up to them. Waving the cop away, he gripped Engel's hand.

"Ah, Mr. Engel!" he said smiling. "I'm Commissioner Marston. Sorry about the mix-up, but we didn't realize you were after C. G. Come in, please."

Bewildered, Engel followed him into an office and looked through spacious windows down at the spires of a city he had never known. Beside a desk sat a wizened old man whose yellowed skin drawn taut over his broad skull gave him a shriveled, cadaverous aspect. He tapped a blue card on a thumbnail as his luminous eyes followed Engel suspiciously.

"Doctor Weeve, my chief alienologist," Marston said. "Sit down, Engel."

Engel grasped the arms of his chair as Dr. Weeve scrutinized the card in silence.

"Jeffrey Engel," he read aloud in a high petulant voice. "Missing Persons Bureau, eh? Hmm, reminiscent of the twentieth century. Is that what you call your detective agency?"

Reminiscent of . . . Engel pressed shaky fingers to his throbbing head. If he told them he was from out of the past, how would they react? "Yes," he lied, "I found a fountain pen—"

"You lone wolves have extraordinary hunches to compensate for a lack of police techniques," Dr. Weeve said with a dry chuckle. "But one needs protection when tracking aliens."

"Tracking aliens?" Engel said, mystified.

Marston laughed, leaned over his desk, and twirled a fountain pen in pudgy fingers. "Take it easy, you're not suspect in this case. But the report says you found this pen and in attempting to return it to its owner, you were struck by some invisible force." Marston glanced at Dr. Weeve who nodded, then his voice grew hard. "Did this C. G. aim anything at you before you were hit?"

"No, he didn't," Engel said and touched his head nervously.

"Headache?" Dr. Weeve asked.

"No, it's nothing," Engel coun-

tered. "When I got up, the man was gone."

"You mean the alien was gone," Dr. Weeve contradicted him.

Engel's throat went dry and he stared at them.

"An alien!" shouted Marston. "Don't you understand?"

Dr. Weeve smiled thinly. "Mr. Engel's curious to learn the latest about them and would draw us out in this childish way. I assure you we despise them far more than millions who only read about them in their daily telescripts. Since the flying saucer crash in '68, we've been very much aware of their close surveillance of this world."

The doctor's face clouded as he gazed at the city. "The filthy blue spawn of Centauri send us exceedingly clever spies. Before invading our cities, they must seek out our military installations and plant explosives at key points. Their assassins must be ready to strike . . ."

Dr. Weeve gently wrung bony hands, and Marston leaned forward, his pale jowls quivering angrily. "To safeguard public welfare, this city branch of Alien Detection must find and exterminate aliens. So far we can boast of a perfect record, thanks to the new detection screen."

Aliens? Engel winced, recalling the mournful little stranger. "I can't believe that he—"

"That he's a humanoid?" Mars-

ton spat out the word as if it were a lump of vileness in his throat. "C. G.'s a sneaking saboteur who conceals his ugly blue hide under a layer of false skin! But he's been detected."

"He's detected?" Engel gasped.

Dr. Weeve inclined his vulture-like head quizzically. "For an intelligent man, Mr. Engel, you seem rather poorly informed." He reached to a cabinet, and across a cathode ray screen trembled a narrow ribbon of light.

"As you know," he said, "every act of an organism is preceded by an attitude, and that attitude takes the form of electromagnetic brain waves. The detection screen is quite simple. Sensitive electronic devices under the city dome pick up, amplify, and transmit brain waves to the central control here. Deviations from the social norm-wave are promptly investigated."

HE ran a gnarled finger along the ribbon of light. "Note the low, rhythmic pulsations of the norm-wave—a happy citizen at a social task somewhere in the city." He adjusted a dial, and on the screen flashed a spasmodically twitching band. "A variation of anti-social type three—a citizen planning murder. Criminal Detection has a police detail observing him, and before he can strike, they'll take him in custody. Now

C. G., the pseudo-man we're having shadowed."

A jagged white band leaped in a wild dance.

"Even cerebral abnormalities don't register this violently," the doctor said. "The electrical impulses of his artificial brain are powerful. The detectors easily penetrate his feeble brain shield. He thinks he moves unnoticed on his evil mission—but look at his tremendous pent-up hatred and fear!"

Engel stiffened, his palms moist with sweat. C. G. was somewhere in this city of the future. Of course he was feeling terrified—but these witch-hunters were mistaking that terror for something else! He choked at a sudden thought. Why hadn't they discovered his own fear yet? Was his head injury somehow protecting him from their sensitive machines?

Dr. Weeve was regarding him stonily.

"Ingenious!" Engel blurted out.

Marston placed an automatic on his desk and beside it a box of shells. "Yes, ingenious," he said, grinning, "but luckily for me these gadgets can't do everything. Trapping the alien is next, and that's my department. Show him the Tracer Room, doctor."

Nervously trailing Dr. Weeve, Engel went to a steel door and peered through a window. For a

moment it seemed as if he were high above the twinkling lights of a city at night until he made out a dark, sunken room and skeletal figures with earphones clamped to their long heads. They bent over a flat surface illuminated with bright grid lines and sprinkled over with a myriad glowing dots. Gaunt shadowy faces were fixed on a pip of light.

"They place him on the east side of Baxter Avenue between 43rd and 44th streets," Dr. Weeve explained. He rubbed a lean jaw, frowning. "But how the detectors failed to pick up his presence before he reached the civic center baffles us. Seems as if he just popped up there."

"I'm ready for the kill, gentlemen!" crowed Marston, slapping the holster strapped to his side. "You look pretty impressed, Engel."

"Yes, yes, I am," Engel managed to say.

With the doctor close behind, he followed Marston apprehensively down a corridor to a thick convex window. Marston slid it back and stepped into what resembled a bowl-shaped cockpit, a confusing maze of dials and instruments under a hemisphere of glass. Motioning Engel to a seat, he turned to the dashboard, and the same spot of light which Engel had seen in the Tracer Room flashed on a

screen. He jabbed a button twice and picked up a microphone.

"Marston to Captain Schaeffer. We're coming down."

"Yes, sir. The alien's turned back," a strained voice replied. "He's now walking south on Baxter. Might be on to us, he's acting jumpy."

"You sound jumpy yourself, Schaeffer," Marston snapped. "Tell your men to hold their fire this time! All right, I have him on optibeam."

Marston spun a wheel sharply, and they were falling. Engel braced himself as a white glistening tower swung away to their left, and the geometric depths of the city loomed up. He saw the doctor take a gun from a compartment, check it, and stand up wavering. His face was a mask of suppressed hate.

"We'll dispatch him quickly," he hissed.

Engel squirmed. To prevent a ruthless murder he'd have to not only outwit these men but countless police besides. What was worse, with his headache almost gone, his own uncontrollable waves of fear might expose him.

"HE'S running," Marston said with a nod at the screen. As the globe shot down past white towers, a spotlight on the glass roof flashed red, and a shrill siren

stung Engel's ears. Ahead of them a big globe fled out of their way, its passengers looking back at them, frightened. Black dots on the street scurried to the towers.

"I see him!" Dr. Weeve screeched.

Below them a man was running past a gray wall of huddled people. He looked at them, dropped a briefcase, and sprinted into the deserted street. Marston chuckled into the mike. "We have him, Schaeffer. Not putting up much of a fight, is he?"

"No, sir."

Marston glided the globe a few yards above and slightly behind his quarry. As Engel stared down at the man's flapping coat and thin, blond hair, he clenched his fists. It was C. G. The siren moaned to a stop, and in the sudden silence that filled the globe he could hear weary footsteps and anguished breathing. Heavy-lidged eyes narrowed at Engel.

"Recognize him?"

Engel's mouth opened, and his throat tightened. He closed his eyes and nodded.

"Halt, alien!" Marston's voice boomed over a loudspeaker.

C. G. whirled, and they saw a soiled, rumpled suit and a trembling small face. A tear spilled down one cheek.

"W-who are you?" he cried out. "What do you want?"

Marston put the muzzle of his automatic through a gun port and fired. C. G. screamed and fell. Then in bright dusty sunlight he rolled on one side, groaning, and clutched his arm where a dark stain spread slowly down his sleeve.

"You disappoint us, alien," Marston rasped. "Where's your espionage training? Where's the cunning to test our wits?"

Soft, pitiful sobs answered Marston who barked, "Get up and run for your life!"

C. G. got up and limped away, and Dr. Weeve turned in surprise. "What are you waiting for? Why don't you finish him?"

Marston grinned. "He's headed for the park so I'll finish him there. I'd like some old style hunting."

"Are you taking leave of your senses?" exclaimed Dr. Weeve. "What about the weapon he used on Engel? Without this armor-glass, you're risking your life!"

"If he has a weapon, why didn't he use it?" Marston fumed. "It's probably in that briefcase he dropped." He bellowed into the mike, "Clear the park!"

Numbly Engel watched C. G. stumble past police riflemen at the end of the street and crawl into dense shrubbery. The globe zoomed ahead, then poised motionless over treetops as Marston searched for his prey.

"Watch for him!" Marston

whispered huskily.

But Engel watched the screen in horror. A telltale circle of light, its rim overlapping that of C. G.'s burned steadily brighter. An alarm bell rang on the instrument panel. Dr. Weeve raised a claw-like hand to a switch, then eyed Engel queerly. "Something wrong?" he said. "Stomach queasy?"

His eyes fell on the screen. "Another alien!" he shrieked.

Dr. Weeve's thin lips parted and his fingers fumbled at the safety catch of his gun. Engel hurled him aside and grabbed at the wheel. The globe keeled crazily, the trees rushed up at them. With a dull crash the glass shattered, and struggling out of Marston's flabby arms, Engel kicked open the door and dropped to earth. He scrambled to his feet and crashed through high bushes, ducking as a lance of flame charred branches overhead.

"There's two of them!" Marston's choked voice thundered and reverberated against distant towers.

Engel paused in a dark glade to hear a police whistle shrill and a dry crackling grow louder behind him. Stealthily he crept toward sunlight. With a shock he saw C. G. sitting in the open, exposed and dejected, his head bowed in pain. Engel dashed over to him, hoisted him on his shoulders, and

staggered over thick grass to a gravel walk. Then the ground beneath him quaked. The hoarse cries of the hunters faded.

GENTLY he lowered C. G. to a park bench, and an old man nodding in the warm sunshine raised bleary, astonished eyes. Engel turned to see a nurse pushing a baby carriage and the old, familiar skyline of the city smiling down on them. He shook with relief. Like an enraptured music lover he listened to the faint roar of traffic.

"Don't let them kill me!" C. G. cried.

"Winos with the d.t.s.," the old man muttered and stomped off.

"They're gone—all gone!" Engel shouted.

The little fellow groaned, pressing his wound. "You helped me—your world need not fear us..."

Engel spoke to him comfortingly. "Hold on, buddy, I'll get a doctor." He pushed his way through a gathering crowd to a telephone booth. As he stepped inside, he saw C. G. limp quickly to the subway stairs. By the time he had hurried back, the little fellow was gone.

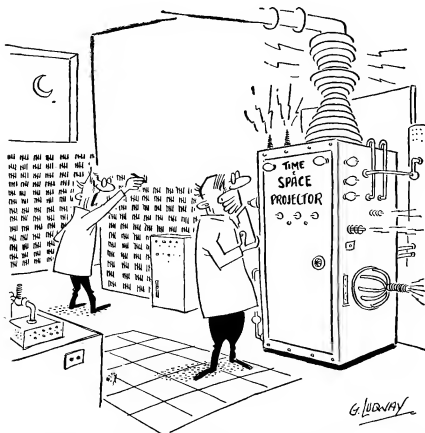
Puzzled, Engel reached for a hand railing to steady himself. He had lived a nightmare filled with obsessed men who dreaded blue-skinned aliens from a distant

world! He touched something sticky and realized the bleeding C. G. must have clung to the railing as he descended. Then he sud-

denly hoped he was mistaken. The dark blotch on his fingers could be wet paint. It had to be.

It was blue . . .

THE END



"Well, another day — I'm beginning to think poor Smedley isn't coming back!"

EMERGENCY RATIONS

By

Theodore R. Cogswell

There's more than one way to skin a cat when you're hungry, the aliens thought. Or, more aptly, skin a defenseless, unsuspecting human . . .



“THE obvious base for offensive operations is this deserted little system here.”

Kat Zul, the Supreme Commander of the Royal Zardonian fleet stabbed one tentacle at a point on the star map.

“Once we are established there, the whole Solar flank lies open to us. We can raid here — and here —and here—” he indicated sector after sector, “and they will never be able to assemble enough ships in one spot to stop us. What do you think, Sire?”

The Gollen patted his corpulent belly. “There will be good eating. Mind you save the fattest for the royal kitchen.” Orange saliva drooled from the corners of both his mouths. “Roasted haunch of human three times a day. How delightful! Remind me to invite you in for dinner some night after you get back.”

“Thank you, Sire. I will order reconnaissance patrols out at once. If all is clear we can begin construction of a base within the month. Once our heavy armament is installed, we will be impregnable. You will eat well then, O Mighty One!”

The Gollen of Zardon burped happily, closed his eye, and dreamed of dinner.

A week later a fast courier came screaming back with news of trou-

ble. The Supreme Commander took one good look at the report, grabbed the photographs that came with it, and rushed in to see the Gollen.

“The system is already occupied, Sire! By humans!”

“Fine, send me a brace of plump ones at once.”

“Your forgiveness, Highness, but that is impossible. We can’t get at them. They have erected a space station, a heavy Z type with protective screens that can stop anything we throw at them. I have blockading squadrons around it now, but we must act quickly. They got an appeal for help off before we were able to blanket their transmitter.”

The Gollen paled to a light mauve. “In that case,” he said softly, “I shall have you for dinner. If the humans gain control of that system, *our* whole flank lies open to them!”

“There is yet hope, Sire,” said Kat Zul quickly. “The space station is only partially completed and, as far as we can determine, occupied only by a construction crew. None of its defensive armament has been installed yet. Once they drop their screen, we have them. We can fortify the station ourselves, and control of the system will be ours.”

The Gollen reached into a silver bowl filled with wiggling *guba*,

selected an especially fat one, and bit off its head with his lower mouth.

"Why should they?" he said with his upper one.

"Should they what?"

"Drop their protective screens. Their power piles can keep them energized for the next hundred years."

"Ah, Highness, but screen generators are tricky things. They require constant attention. When no humans are alive to tend them, they will shut off automatically. And within two months there will be no humans left alive. They will all have starved to death. We captured their supply ship yesterday."

"I don't like it. In the first place, a starved human is an inedible human, and in the second, their relief fleet won't take more than a month to get there. I believe you were talking in terms of two months. You'll have to do better than that, Kat Zul, or you'll be fricasee by evening!"

AS the stew pot came nearer, Kat Zul thought faster. He barely beat the deadline.

"In this life, Highness," he said pontifically, "it is either eat, or be eaten."

"This is obvious," said the Gollen, "and since for you to eat me would be *lese majesty*, the second

half of your truism is more appropriate to the present occasion. Cook!"

"You don't understand," said Kat Zul in desperation. "In this case we can eat by being ready to be eaten." He retreated around the table. "Listen, please! The robot supply ship we captured was loaded with food. If we wait another two weeks, the humans in the space station will be getting terribly hungry."

"I'm getting mighty hungry right now," said the Gollen. "But I'll listen. Go ahead."

"Among the food on the supply ship we found several hundred cans containing strange clawed creatures in a nutrient solution. They're alive!"

"So?"

"So we'll remove all the food from the ship except those cans. Then we will open them carefully and remove the animals inside. Next we will replace them with ourselves and have the cans resealed."

"What!"

"A stroke of sheer genius, Highness! In each of the cans will be one of my best fighting men. We will put the robot supply ship back on course and chase it to the space station, firing near-misses all the way. When they see it coming with us in pursuit, the humans will open their screens enough to let it

through. Once they've checked it carefully with their scanners, they'll bring it into the station and unload it at once. They'll be so hungry that the first thing they'll go for will be the food. But when they open the cans, instead of finding little live animals, out will spring my warriors. Ah, Sire, there will be a fine slitting of throats. With the screens shut off, we can arm the station at once, and when the human fleet comes—"He laughed exultantly and clicked his razor-sharp forward mandibles together like castanets.

"As you say, Kat Zul, a stroke of sheer genius," said the Gollen. "Have you selected your personal can yet?"

The fleet commander's olfactory feelers stood straight out. "Me? To tell you the truth, Highness, I hadn't planned on being one of the raiding party. The fact is that I suffer from a touch of claustrophobia and—"

"Would you rather stay for dinner?"

"Well, Sire

"Cook!"

"On second thought . . ."

* * *

"HEY, Mac."

"Yeah?"

"What'n the hell's *lobster*?"

"Beats me. Why?"

"Somebody sure fouled up back at base. There's about a thousand cans of it on the supply ship—and nothing else."

"Well, open one and find out. I'm hungry!"

"Who isn't. But they're alive. It says so on the can. They're packed away in some sort of nutrient solution."

"So they're alive. There's a law says you can't take them out and kill them?"

"There's a picture on the can."

"So?"

"They got big claws. Looks like they could take a man's finger off with one good bite. Whatta they mean sending stuff like that out?"

"Look, Pinky, I'm busy. Do what you want but don't bother me. I got to nurse this generator. If it flickers just once, we're done for. Now beat it!"

"O. K. I'll go open one up and see what happens."

THERE was silence broken only by a chomping of jaws. 'The eating was good. Kat Zul, the Supreme Commander of the Royal Zardonian fleet, rested motionless at the far end of the table in the place of honor, his belly distended and his eye closed.

At the other end of the table, two hungry mouths opened simultaneously.

"More!"

Pinky beamed cheerfully, picked up the platter on which Kat Zul rested, and passed it down to the two hungry electronics men.

"Help yourselves, boys. There's lot's more where that came from." He took another piece himself. "This sure beats chicken. The way these things are built, there's enough legs for everybody." He pushed his white chef's cap back on his perspiring forehead and surveyed the little group of technicians and construction men happily. This was a red letter day. Nobody had ever asked for seconds on his cooking before.

"Pinky."

"Yes, Mac?"

"What do you call these things again?"

"Lobsters. They sure don't look like the pictures on the cans, though. Guess the guy that made up the label was one of these here abstractionists. You know, those characters that don't paint a thing like it is, but like it would be if it was."

"Yeah," said Mac, "Sure." He noticed a bandage on Pinky's right forefinger. "I see ya got nipped after all."

Pinky held his finger up and inspected it with interest. "Sure was a mean cut, almost to the bone it was. And that reminds me, when's one of you mechanical

wizards going to fix my can opener for me? For a month I've been after you and all I get is promises."

"Tomorrow, first thing," said Mac.

"Tomorrow, always tomorrow," said Pinky. "Look at that finger. That ain't no bite; it got ripped on the edge of a can. I didn't take no chances on being bitten. I was all set to open the first can when I got to looking at the picture on the label, and the more I looked at it, the less I liked the idea of having something like that running around my galley alive. So ya know what I did?"

"No," said Mac patiently, tearing another leg off the carcass of Kat Zul and munching on it appreciatively.

"Well, you know I mostly cook by intuition."

A collective groan went up from his listeners. Every time Pinky had an inspiration, it usually involved a handful or so of curry powder.

"But this time I decided to go by the book. The recipe said to boil vigorously for twenty minutes, so I did. Once the kettle got boiling good, I tossed in a dozen, can and all. I figured they would cook as well inside the container as outside, and that way I wouldn't have to worry about their claws. They was alive all right, too. You should have heard them batting

around inside those cans for the first couple of minutes."

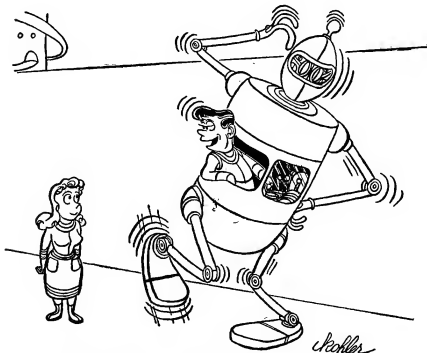
Mac shivered uncomfortably. "Don't seem human somehow to make critters suffer so. Next time you'd better open the cans and kill them first. If you're scared, call me and I'll come down and do the job for you."

"There's no need for that," said Pinky. "Them things can't feel nothing. They ain't got no nervous

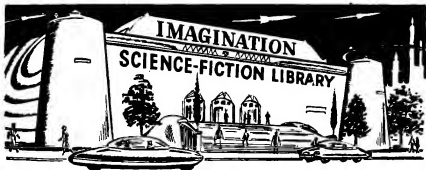
systems. It says so in the cookbook."

"If that's what it says," said Mac, "I guess it's so. Just keep dishing them out the way you did tonight and I'll be happy." He loosened his belt, leaned back, and sighed contentedly.

Pinky wasn't listening. He could hardly wait until time came to prepare breakfast. He made a mental note to get a larger boiling pot.



"This is nothing . . . wanna see him walk tippy-toe?"



— REVIEWING CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION BOOKS —

Conducted by Mark Reinsberg

Hard cover science fiction is booming and many fine novels and anthologies are available at all bookstores or by writing direct to the publishers. Each month IMAGINATION will review selected books as a guide to your recommended reading list.

STAR SCIENCE FICTION STORIES

edited by Frederick Pohl. 205 pages, \$1.50 (paperbound edition 35c). Ballantine Books, New York, N. Y.

Here's a remarkably good anthology at a bargain price. Remarkably, because all fifteen stories in it are printed for the first time. Usually that would make one doubt their quality—several other sf anthologies having presented original material with dismal results. But Pohl's collection is a tribute to his gathering as well as editorial abilities.

Admirable variety of content is supplied by Morrison's space veterinarian, Kornbluth's time-traveling stock market speculator, Asimov's cybernetic marriage broker, Leiber's droll alien-sex parody of

Mickey Spillane, Clarke's muted end of the universe, Simak's rural "Contraption," Tenn's grim interlude in the eighteenth year of Jovian siege, Sheekly's Martian Pandora, and Wyndham's charming trans-time love affair pointing up the romantic aura that future centuries may well attach to our own present-day life.

Other tales are by H. L. Gold, del Rey, Merrill, Leinster and Bradbury. Pohl's urban prefaces to each tale set the right biographical tone, even if in a few instances the stories themselves falter. Neither science nor fantasy are overly obtrusive in this collection, which maintains a welcome balance of cosmic logic and warmheartedness.

THE BEST FROM FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION

Second Series. Edited by Anthony Boucher and J. Francis McComas. 270 pages, \$3.00. Little, Brown & Co., Boston, Mass.

This book is as good as "The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction"—and no better. No different, is perhaps more correct. Its appeal is more or less limited to confirmed readers of the magazine itself. It lacks the variety, the blending of material from many sources that characterizes and gives genuine anthology wide appeal. This Second Series reflects the same editorial taste as the source, and that to a quintessence.

Often, what an individual reader

likes about a magazine may not be what the editor, in his re-screening, considers best. Sometimes good material gets into a magazine as a second choice, an "off-beat" selection. This is the only explanation we can give for saying that while prizing many stories from the magazine itself, we do not find this collection to our taste.

We question the wisdom of a magazine making a book out of itself twice in two years. With due respect for the editorial team of Boucher and McComas, we think magazine editing and anthology-making are two entirely different skills.

CHILDREN OF WONDER

edited by William Tenn. 337 pages, \$3.00. Simon & Schuster, New York, N. Y.

What a peculiar idea. What an odd assortment. Fantasy and science-fiction have never kept stranger company than in this collection of stories about children. Not normal, runny-nosed, prank-playing kids, but unusual, vicious, neurotic children, unlovable, precocious, possessed little demons, children of the future, junior supermen, nursery tots with alien powers, murderers in knee-pants, monsters.

Respectable s-f writers such as Kornbluth, Padgett, Leinster, Sturgeon, Bradbury, Poul Anderson and Judith Merril rub shoulders with the so-called "literary" crowd of D. H. Lawrence, Truman Capote, A. E. Coppard, H. H. Mun-

ro, Graham Greene, E. M. Forster, Aldous Huxley and Stephen Vincent Benet. Oddly enough, the s-f crew has produced the better stories. While the established literary figures display more individualized styles and more impressive word-power, they can't handle fantasy as interestingly or with the same authority as "our boys."

The exceptions are of course Huxley, whose *Brave New World* is excerpted, and Benet, whose "Nightmare for Future Reference," a narrative poem written in 1938, stands out as the best item in the book. William Tenn, whose brainchild this anthology is, has avoided preciousness in his selections, but the whole idea is one of unmatched eccentricity. Infanticide has received its biggest boost since Baby Snooks!



Conducted by Mari Wolf

THE aeronautical engineers were discussing rockets, a little patronizingly, I thought, and I was just about to get into the argument. Especially when one of them said, "It gets me, the way so many people go in for this science fiction stuff."

I sizzled, but he went right on. (He wasn't talking to me anyhow. I'm not an aeronautical engineer!) "They talk as if we're going to get to the Moon tomorrow," he said. "And the planets the day after tomorrow. And maybe the stars next week . . ."

He had a point. Some science fiction fans' ideas are undoubtedly a bit premature. But still, probably not *very* premature.

Which brings up the interesting question: What happens to science fiction fans once the age of space stations, trips to the Moon and the planets, and exploration in the as-

teroid belt has arrived? Of course, science fiction as a field will still be there. Our generation's technology couldn't begin to follow all the extrapolations from its present-day state. There'll be many of the concepts that we know of as fictional today that will still be fictional in the tomorrow of space travel—many of them still science fictional, others discarded, by then, as having been proven pure fantasy.

But what say of the average sf enthusiast—tomorrow's counterpart of you and me? •

It's easy to dream. It's easy to say, "If there's space travel within the next twenty years I'm going to be in on it. I'm going to be a pilot, or a navigator, or at least I'm going to build rocket ships. " Or, if you know you won't be out in space you can give yourself a really fictional reason. You'll be

too old, so all you can do is finance ships for others to fly. You'll have turned to success in other fields, but still you hunger when the rocket blasts off for Mars. You're a woman, and so can't go, but you'll smile goodbye to your pilot husband and never let him know how you hate being earthbound. Recognize the examples? Of course—you've read them. And fine tales they were.

But for most of us, or for our children, it won't be so dramatic. It'll probably be more as it is today

Do you own an airplane? The odds are that you don't. Do you know how to fly one? Unless you've been in the Air Force, once again the odds are against it. And yet, until half a century ago, flying—riding the air like a bird—was about the most science fictional thing you could think of. (Unless, maybe, you were H. G. Wells!) Because for generations man has wanted to fly. Even back in the days when the earth was fixed and flat, when the stars were pin-pricks of light circling the earth, not very far away, just a sort of super sky-effect, when planets were erratically moving stars and the sun and moon were but a few steps removed from the status of ordinary gods—even then man wanted to fly. Through the air. Through space? No, for the concept of space travel had to wait for the concept of space itself.

A hundred years ago man was farther removed technologically, from the airplane than he is today from the space ship. A hundred years ago the concept of heavier than air flight would have been pure

science fiction, extrapolations from the known science of the time. Today we have jet aircraft, speeds faster than sound, radar controlled planes, high altitude flight, pressurized cabins, G suits—and weightless flight achieved in jets that fling themselves upward over a parabolic arc so fast that the outward pull of centrifugal force exactly cancels the downward pull of gravity. Tomorrow—space.

And yet, of all the science fiction fans, how many fly? How many have even flown in a commercial plane. And of those, how many have availed themselves of the chance to take a ride in a small plane?—to really get the sensations of flight, when nothing seems between you and the distant ground but a flimsy sheet of plywood!

How many have ever glided up a warm air current, the ultimate in the sensation of flight, of freedom from the earth, say those who glide

I wouldn't know, myself. I've never glided either, though I'd like to, someday.

Planes cost money. Even riding in planes cost money. (Though you can fly up over most large cities on a sightseeing air-tour for only a few dollars.) And besides, it doesn't matter so much, because the planes will always be around, and if you don't ride in one this year you surely will next year, or the year after.

Space ships will cost money too. And rides on them won't be free. Furthermore, not everyone who'd like to ride a rocket ship will want to make a career out of it, take up rocketry professionally.

Lots of people won't care. They will take the space ships completely for granted, once the first novelty wears off. Other people will care. Some of them will ride the rockets. More of them will stay on the farm, or in the family business, or in a steady job somewhere. Maybe they'll take a short vacation to the Moon—the newest International Park. Or maybe they'll just talk about taking the trip someday.

BUT what of the science fiction fan? What will *your* counterpart of tomorrow do? What would you do, if you'd been born, with your present personality, your present orientation toward life, a few years later?

If you were a rocket enthusiast, and if you had the patience and the background and the qualifications, maybe you'd be in rocketry, interested in space ships because they're brand new, unbuilt, crystallized merely on paper and in the heads of dreamers—why then tomorrow maybe you wouldn't be interested in them at all. Tomorrow's airplanes. There'd be something still newer—some interstellar drive perhaps—that you could give your imagination to.

The Moon, the planets, won't have today's glamor once they're known. There are many beautiful spots on earth, many places utterly alien, utterly foreign to the terrain where you live. Do you visit them? Do you make any effort to seek them out? Or are you content with pictures of them, with movies, with other people's descriptions? Content to leave them alone because they're known, ex-

plored, without any hidden crannies where your imagination can wander . . .

Someday the Moon too will be a spot where travelogues are filmed, and there'll be Sunday supplement features on the glories of Mars. And then perhaps people will think of a Martian explorer in much the same way they now think of a Himalayan mountain climber: how interesting that he does it, but as for me, I'll stay right here on the ground, thank you!

Maybe your next generation counterpart will have a routine job in a spaceship factory. It'll be the same old grind—the same sections of hull to weld together, day in and day out. Too bad he doesn't have a job that requires more imagination. More dash. Because he's really very creative. Now that sub-space generator that the army's keeping so hush-hush . . . If only he could work on something really interesting like that.

Instead of this lumbering old Earth-Venus crate that ought to have been redesigned five years ago!

He'll cruise home in his helicopter past the rocket port and he won't even look up as the 5:17 Thursday-packet blasts off for Mars. He'll be too busy listening to the latest science fiction story to bother.

Farfetched? I don't think so. I took a trip, not too long ago, on which one of my companions was a well known science fiction fan. It was a sightseeing trip—National parks, exotic landscapes of the American southwest, scenes that looked as if they'd been lifted

from a Bonestell painting. But the fan, though he enjoyed the trip, was quite uninterested in the scenery, most of which looked just about as unearthly as anything the TV studios have dreamed up yet. What was Earth to him? He was interested in space—in other planets, in alien worlds . . .

Tomorrow, what would the solar system be to him? He'd be extremely interested in the proposed first trip to Alpha Centaurus, to be sure, but why bother going out of your way to look at Jupiter?

Day after tomorrow? What would he want then? Another undiscovered star? Another galaxy? Another dimension, maybe?

I'm extrapolating too far, of course. And yet—how often have you glanced casually at an airplane, at an automobile, at a TV set, and a few minutes later wished, in all sincerity, that you had been born into that infinitely brighter tomorrow of space ships, and Martian cruises, and trips beyond the Belt . . .

All of which says, of course, that a science fiction fan looks forward to tomorrow, whenever that tomorrow may be. And no matter how far science and technology progress, the type of person who's an sf enthusiast today should never be jaded, never bored. Because there's always more, always a shining, glittering new world, a wonderfully edible carrot just out of reach. In the future . . .

* * *

And in the more immediate future, don't forget the special occurrence over the Labor Day Week-

end—the 11th World Science Fiction Convention, held this year in Philadelphia. If you can possibly make it, don't miss it. You'll have a wonderful time.

Your ticket, and membership in the Convention, is only a dollar. You can send that dollar to the 11th World Science Fiction Convention, Box 2019, Philadelphia 3, Pa. They can give you all the latest information. And then, when Labor Day arrives, you can meet everyone, fans and pros, from all over the country, and have the time of your life.

Try to make it, won't you?

Now, to the fanzines.

* * *

STF TRENDS: 25c; monthly; Lynn A. Hickman, Box 184, Napoleon, Ohio. Here you'll find a really top quality fanzine, well-rounded, extremely readable. It's a zine you'll probably want to subscribe to.

The covers are exceptionally good. Sometimes they're humorous, like Plato Jones' utterly fantastic scene where a workman on a girder hanging suspended in midair is confronted with a hungry looking tiger. Other times they're serious, like Alan Hunter's tribute to a bard. Very, very good, that one.

Wilkie Conner talks things over in his "Konner's Korner." Carl Lawrence assures us that science fiction prophesies *all* major inventions (if not before they're invented, then at least afterwards). And Harlan Ellison begins a serial about fandom outlawed to a distant solar system, a serial where in the characters are all the leading fans of today. (They'll still

be around. By then mankind has all sort of life preservers, or longevity pills.) Ellison's "The Long Episode" is quite a tale—if you've any acquaintance at all with any of its characters.

You'll like STF Trends I'm sure. It has just about everything.

* * *

SLANT: 25c, or 1/3 in the British Isles, published irregularly; Walter Willis, Oblique House, 170 Upper Newtonwards Rd., Belfast, North Ireland. In the issue I have here James White has turned out another superlative *Slant* cover—a four color, shaded picture of a rocket ship poised under the night sky of some alien world.

It's the kind of cover art that I personally would like to see more of, on professional magazines too.

Slant is hard to describe. Humorous? Yes—in its Belfastly subtle way. Here you'll see satire that never lets itself go too far. Just try Bob Shaw's and Vince Clarke's article, "An Inexpensive Fanzine Printing Press." Or how to convert your bicycle into some thing useful for turning out fanzines. The directions are explicit. They almost tempt you to steal a cycle somewhere and try them out.

But you have to read the article to really appreciate it.

In this issue too there's A. Bertram Chandler's "Path of Glory," a tale of what-might-have-been-if. And there's William F. Temple and his "Temple Memoirs," a hilarious accounting of the old days of the "fictional" British Rocket Society—no relation, of course, to the B.I.S., or British Interplanetary Society.

Here's a fine little magazine. One you'll not only enjoy reading, but one you'll want to keep and show to your friends who can't believe that people actually put out *good* amateur magazines for fun.

* * *

TYRANN: 15c; Norbert Hirschhorn, 853 Riverside Drive, New York 32, N. Y. Co-editors Hirschhorn and Henry Ebel put out one of the best duplicated, or purpleinked, fanzines. It's a very legible, good looking job, too.

In this issue Tyrann leads off with an editorial on tyranny, and a history of the concept of justice and the change in thought as regards the penal system and punishment. Then Bob Silverberg's "Blurbs" reviews just that—past and present blurbs as they have appeared leading off stories in the pro magazines. And V. Paul Nowell writes on "Personalities in Saucerdome," or who's who in the flying saucer, sighting world.

A good zine, where you'll find some interesting ideas kicked around.

* * *

MICRO: 10c; published every six weeks; Donald O. Cantin, 214 Bremer St., Manchester, N. H. In this small-sized fanzine that fits easily into your pocket (or pocketbook, as the case might be) you'll find some varied articles of fannish interest.

For instance, in this issue Robert Bloch and Joe Semenovitch each discuss the present state of fandom, and the fact that people for years have been saying that fandom is overcliquish, too split up, and in imminent danger of perishing.

ing. And fandom flourishes on. As Semenovich says about the diversity of types of fanzines: "No two are exactly alike. No two would cater to exactly the same tastes. No two would—or (and this is important) *could* hope to satisfy every fan or potential fan, be all things to all men." Explaining, I think, why cliques, or groups, do arise.

And surely, somewhere among all the fanzines and all the people who write for them, you'll find *your* own interests reflected.

* * *

FANTASY-TIMES: 10c; published twice a month; James V. Taurasi, 137-03 32nd Ave., Flushing 54, N. Y.. How Editor Taurasi and staff manage to keep up their schedule month after month, year after year, I'll never figure out. But keep it up they do—and they will keep you informed of everything that's going on in the science fiction world.

If they were running a really professional newspaper they couldn't turn out a much better job. For here you'll find everything, news, fresh from the editorial offices and publishing houses, radio and TV news, midwest news, Hollywood stf news. Books. And all the personalities of the stf world, both fan and pro.

Well-written, concise, and highly informative—that's Fantasy-Times.

* * *

STARFARER: 25c; Henry Oden, 2317 Myrtle St., Alexandria, Louisiana. Here's a brand-new fanzine (photo-offset) that starts out with autobiographies of some well known

fans. They're Joe Semenovich, Lee Hoffman, Lynn Hickman, Lee Riddle, and Walt Willis. Also you'll find a couple of short-shorts and some cartoons.

The first issue is only partly printed—two styles of reproduction here. This one issue sold for 20c, but henceforth, as the zine goes on it'll be a quarter. It looks as if it will grow into a really good one,

* * *

ECLIPSE: 5c; bimonthly; Ray Thompson, 410 South 4th. St., Norfolk, Nebraska. You'll get a lot of reading matter for your nickel here, and I think you'll really like it. Marian Cox's column, "The Full Moon," for example. In the issue I have here she tells why she so named the column: "Mythology has it that anything can, and often does happen under a full moon, and that goes for this column, so be prepared."

She also wonders why people think of fans as a group set apart. "After all," she says, "there are many intelligent people who aren't fans." The switcheroo on that, for me, came about a week ago, while I was sitting at lunch reading science fiction, of course, and one of the girls where I work looked up from her role as dummy in the bridge tournament and remarked apropos of nothing, but looking directly at me, "After all, there are lots of intelligent people who don't play bridge."

Bobby Gene Warner's "The Stuffed Monkey" is a horrifying little horror tale. And Joe Nydahl explores the "first to see the Moon" theme in "Unknown Elements." Lots more you'll like, too.

And so inexpensive. What can you lose?

* * *

VARIANT WORLDS: 15c; Sheldon Deretchin, 1234 Utica Ave., Brooklyn 3, N. Y. VW is now mimographed instead of dittoed, but you'll still find the same types of fannish humor and semi-serious article as before. And Hopkins' critiques on the cover, too.

There's Dave Merron's fantasy play, "Witch," about what happens when you defy an old woman who's a crony of the devil himself. Also A. Charles Catania discusses—and draws—some typical BEMs. (Bug-eyed monsters to you.) Stupid critiques, BEMS, letting puny Earthling heroes win out over them.

And Henry Moskowitz tells "How I Became A Fan," an article you'll like chiefly because it's so typical of how people do get into this strange way of life that's called fandom.

* * *

DREAM QUEST: Don Wilson, 833 Ocean Ave., Santa Monica, Calif. Copies available to non-FAPA members on request.

Dream Quest is one of the zines put out by FAPA members. (They are the Fantasy Amateur Press Association.) It's an unusual zine in that it's devoted almost entirely to reviews, both of pro and amateur magazines. First, Editor Wilson comments on the other fanzines in the FAPA mailing, and then there is a comprehensive review section that just about covers the entire professional field.

Very informative, especially if you haven't time to keep up with everything new in science fiction.

* * *

OPERATION FANTAST: Capt. K. F. Slater, 13 Gp. R. P. C., B. A. O. R., 29, c/o G.P.O., England. For 75c you can subscribe to OF, receive four quarterly copies all the extra newsletters, and the many benefits of membership in O.F. This club maintains many features of interest to corresponding members—you can not only strike up acquaintance with fans in England, Australia, or South Africa, but you can also rent books through the club library. (Though maybe postage would be a little high in the United States.)

Operation Fantast itself is a fine printed magazine giving all the news—and pictures—of what's going on in fandom abroad. Also an excellent review section on current science fiction. Also top quality writing about people and ideas in the sf world.

An interesting zine from a really active club.

* * *

TORQUASIAN TIMES: 25c; published irregularly by R. H. Reneau, Walt Sauers and Graham E. Frye at 1041 Cayuga St., Santa Cruz, Calif. Here's a digest-sized printed fanzine with a lot of readable and eye-appealing material. Here you will find good, varied fiction—Jo Neilson's "The Rug" in the issue I have here is a weird little tale indeed.

In the non-fiction section David H. Keller writes on the "Philosophy of Age." Keller, one of the really old-time science fiction and fantasy greats, giving his own impressions of old age and youth and the modern world. Very good, of course.

I think you'll like this "organ

of the torpid Torquasians."

* * *

KAYMAR TRADER: 10c; K. Martin Carlson, 1028 3rd. Ave. So., Moorhead, Minn. Here's the place for all you stf collectors to make known what you want. Here too you can read over all that's offered for sale by other collectors. And if you have some stf or fantasy books or magazines you want to dispose of, here's where you can buy advertising space reasonably.

Strictly a trading medium.

* * *

NONSENSE: 25c; bimonthly; Terry Carr, 134 Cambridge St., San Francisco 12, Calif. This is the cartoon fanzine, with drawings by David Rike, Maurice Lemus, Mike Walker, Ray Capella, James Davis, and Denness Morton. Some of the drawings are really rib-tickling, such as Rike's out of season Halloween joke—the ghost knocking on the door and saying, "Trick or Treat?" Or Walker's drawing of one planet to another, as the spaceship approaches, "I've got it all figured out. When they try to land, I duck . . ."

Why not send in a nickel? You'll get some multi-colored cartoons that'll give you a few chuckles.

* * *

BOO! 10c; monthly; Bob Stewart, 274 Arlington St., San Francisco, Calif. Here's a hectographed zine that's printed in almost every color imaginable—red, black, green, yellow, brown, and purple, and—maybe I missed something. The yellow is a bit hard to read, though.

This is a really fannish zine. Fan art, fan humor, fan fun. If you don't like the particular zany

brand of humor that's so common in fandom you won't care for Boo! Otherwise you'll like it . . .

* * *

STAR ROCKETS: 10c; published about every forty days; Raleigh Evans Multog, 7 Greenwood Rd., Pikesville 8, Maryland. If you subscribe to Star Rockets you automatically become a member of the Star Rocket Science Fiction Correspondence Club. Teenagers are especially welcomed.

Also, from Kobe, Japan, there's reporter-editor Tetsu Yano, who writes about trying to find science fiction material in his native city.

* *

FAN TO SEE: 10c; monthly; Larry Touzinsky, 2911 Minnesota Ave., St. Louis 18, Mo. Here's a newish fanzine with a lot of material and lots of interior art. A good deal of it is undraped art, too, so if you like all your people clad in bulky space suits you probably won't care too much for these . . .

In the issue I have here Editor Touzinsky writes about Orville Mosher's mammoth undertaking, Project Fan Club, reviewed here previously. And Max Miller discusses flying saucers—he's a saucer fan. Want to get into the debate?

* * *

Well, that seems to be all in the Box this time. Guess it's time to shut up shop until next month. Keep sending those fanzines in to me, Mari Wolf, Fandora's Box, IMAGINATION, Box 230, Evanston, Illinois.

And don't forget, this Labor Day Weekend it's Philadelphia. Hope you make it there.

—Mari Wolf

L etters

from the R eaders

GONE—BUT WHERE?

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Just finished reading the June issue of *Madge*, and thoroughly enjoyed it. The feature, **WORLDS WITHOUT** was especially interesting. Mention was made of mysterious human disappearances that have, and are, taking place throughout the world. This brought to mind an excellent reference of such "vanishings"—the books of Charles Fort. A few of the mysteries he recounts have always intrigued me. Examples:

Of 170,473 disappearances in London during 1907-1913, some 3,260 cases remained unsolved.

Ambrose Bierce in 1913. Then an Ambrose Small of Toronto in 1919, regarding which Fort asked: "Was somebody collecting Ambroses?"

The cases are legion through the years, and are, of course, going on even now. What's behind it all?

Alex Saunders

34 Hillsdale Ave., W.

Toronto 12, Ont., Canada

Disappearances — unexplainable — have always fascinated us, too,

Alex. Dick Shaver, of the famed "Shaver Mystery" would maintain people are spirited away by "de-voes" from cavern cities beneath the Earth's surface. The article in our June issue hinted at a "world without"—and there are many other "explanations." Take your pick. None of us will ever know the answer unless we "vanish" too. Heaven forbid! *wh*

STF—IN SIX LANGUAGES!

Dear Ed:

Mr. Tetsu Yano's most gratifying letter in the June issue prompts me to write this. I believe Mr. Yano has found the fundamental source of appeal in *stf*—its universal nature.

What the reader from Japan says concerning the readers' column bears close attention. Like Mr. Yano, I believe that the only way to achieve world harmony is for the common people of this tired world to come to know each other as intimately as possible. The public mails offer a means, of course. But a letter reaches only one person that way. Letter col-

umns in magazines, such as Madge, reach many thousands.

When we get to know one or a few people of a group different than our own, the group no longer seems mysterious or an unknown quantity. The fact that our planet is cursed with over 2000 languages is probably, too, not so great an obstacle as one might imagine.

I, for one, would like to exchange science fiction correspondence with foreign readers in any of the following languages: Spanish, French, German, Portuguese, Latin, or, of course, English.

By all means keep the reader section—for a better understanding of all people—and thank you for a thoroughly enjoyable magazine.

William R. Pogue
111-A Polo Village
Tucson, Arizona

You'll probably get letters from fans in many foreign countries, Bill, since Madge is sent to subscribers all over the world. And don't worry about the reader section being discontinued. Not a chance. *wlh*

WANTS A SERIAL...

Dear wlh:

Bravo!

When I read Mr. Tetsu Yano's letter in the June issue of Madge I thought: "Now there's where I'd send a subscription gratis to a deserving person. I must write and suggest it." So I read your reply and found you had anticipated me. I think this is a fine, friendly gesture on your part, and I'm sure all other fans will agree with me.

I see that you have started to car-

ry more than one illustration to a lead story occasionally. As this is something I've wanted for a long time, I am quite pleased. Keep it up.

Your new book review feature is fine. Fans that object to book reviews are few and far between. Each review brings a different opinion, which makes a good guide for book buying in science fiction.

May I vote as many times as possible for serials. I think serials are the life blood of any magazine. Serials are stories with meat in them. Well seasoned meat with lots of garnishing. So now that IMAGINATION is on a monthly schedule, I think that serials are due for some careful thinking. I don't believe even anti-serial fans would care as long as it was good...

The stories in the June issue were up to Madge's usual standard. THE STAR LORD was a nicely done story. Rather a sad one—but I enjoyed it.

I should end with the usual, "Keep up the good work," but I won't. Instead I'll say, "Keep getting better every issue—and please run a serial."

W. Ted Hinds
Box 718
Ukiah, Cal.

We would never have considered a serial as long as Madge was a bi-monthly or six-weekly, Ted. But now that the magazine appears every four weeks we're not going to turn down a novel length story if it is really terrific. Along those lines watch next issue. *. . . wlh*

A FEW GRIPES TO AIR...

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I have been reading Madge ever

since it hit the newsstands three years ago. That shows that basically I like Madge. I consider it a good magazine, capably edited, with its share of good short stories, and usually good lead stories. But I have a few beefs I want to get off my chest.

First, how about more science and less fantasy in your stories. The fantasy yarns have been somewhat ridiculous—like THE GRUNDER in the June issue.

Secondly, why do you waste so much space on drivel like FANDORA'S BOX and book reviews, when you could use this space for more stories? In the June issue you had some 40 pages of material other than stories. Now I'm sure that most people buy Madge to read the stories, so why not cater to them? Also, one hardly ever reads a letter in the reader section that doesn't scream wildly how good Madge is. How about publishing the other—contrary letters?

But enough of the griping. I still think you have a pretty good magazine, though there are better ones—like *Galaxy*.

Ted Linchitz
2345 Tiebout Ave.
Bronx 58, N. Y.

You'll note, Ted, that fantasy is kept to a minimum in Madge—one to an issue if at all. Now we like fantasy, always have. But we recognize that fantasy fans are in the minority, and science fiction is by far the most popular of the two. But the two are closely allied, so Madge presents both types — although you'll note that science fiction is the "meat" of the book. About those 40 pages you mention. The book reviews take up two pages,

FANDORA'S BOX

takes eight, usually. Are you advocating eliminating the reader section—where you got a chance to have your say—and the cartoons, editorial, et al? We take it that your omission of them is silent approval. Frankly, we have always believed that a well-rounded science fiction magazine presents a number of diverse features—in addition to the stories. We like to think it gives a magazine "personality" and we think Madge has it. As to devoting over 40 pages to "other" things, we believe you're exaggerating somewhat. Better count again. Anyway, we're glad you do like Madge—and we'll be in there pitching to make it your favorite.

A WESTERN YET!

Dear Ed:

After a long break I've finally found a new copy of Madge. In the June issue the stories were generally pretty good. But concerning THE STAR LORD: For the same reason that a western thriller is not science fiction—even though the hero has a blaster and space ship instead of a sixgun and horse—THE STAR LORD isn't science fiction. By taking your space ship from water to hyperspace, and the "Ripples" from water to hyperspace you do not have science fiction. However, the story itself was enjoyable.

I am quite in agreement with your editorial on: "Why I read science fiction."

Though none of the other stories in the issue were bad, I didn't care too much for EFFIE. But I did enjoy THE GRUNDER the most. May I suggest that you expand

your review department and eliminate the science briefs. By all means keep the letter section going strong.

I'd appreciate your comments on my opinion of THE STAR LORD.

Norman Schwarz
10th ORD. Co. (Drt. Spt.)

APO 46, US ARMY
c/o Pm, New York, N. Y.

THE STAR LORD a transplanted western? If it is then every other story called science fiction is the same. The story concerned the maiden voyage of a super space ship to a far planet in another galaxy—through hyperspace, the dangers and perils of which were unknown; also, the reaction of people aboard ship to the trip—and the crisis that developed. Just remember, that story could happen someday! And when it does, it won't be on the rangelands—it'll be in the wide open spaces of the void. Horace Greeley may have said "Go West, young man!" but tomorrow's slogan will be "Go up, young man!" wh

COVER QUESTION

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Enclosed is my subscription to your fine magazine. Along with it I'd like to give you my opinions of Madge.

First of all, the covers. The one on the June issue is the best one I've ever seen on any magazine. Malcolm Smith really knows how to turn out an excellent cover. He never misses. However, there's something about the June cover that bothers me. A person drifting in space without a space suit would "explode" due to internal body pressure—yet the couple on the

June cover seem to float blithely along unaffected!

Your idea of putting the word count beside the story title on the contents page is fine; that way I can determine the length of time it will take me to read a story so I don't have to stop in the middle of one to do something else. I like all of Madge's feature articles. Both INTRODUCING THE AUTHOR and TOMORROW'S SCIENCE are excellent ideas. I greatly enjoy THE EDITORIAL and LETTERS FROM READERS, although FANDORA'S BOX is my favorite. The new feature, IMAGINATION SCIENCE FICTION LIBRARY gets my whole-hearted approval. Please make it a permanent part of the magazine.

Now to the stories. In June, THE STAR LORD, in my estimation, was the best in the book. It reminded me very much (in theme) of a book I read about the sinking of the Titanic. The characterization, plot, and action were superbly combined to make the whole an enthralling story. My congratulations to Boyd Ellanby for a job well done.

PAYCHECK was second on my list, EFFIE, THE GRUNDER, DEATH SENTENCE, and RUB-A-DUB-DUB I rate in that order.

Before I close I'd like to let you know that I've been furthering the cause of science fiction at school. We often receive oral assignments before the class on some subject of our own choosing as part of our work in English. The subject I invariably choose is science fiction. And when someone asked me to recommend a good sf magazine, I always tell them about the best

magazine on the market—IMAGINATION.

Boykin McCaa, Jr.
928 N. Ranney
Sikeston, Mo.

The point you raise about the June cover is well taken. However, we feel it is proper for an artist to take artistic license with his subject for a pleasing symbolic effect. Afterall, what would that scene have looked like if the characters were hideous corpses. The cover was intended to convey the poignant feeling of the story with the young couple reaching out to each other even at the moment of death in space. And as you say, Malcolm did a fine job. We like realism as much as possible, but effect is important too . . . and keep plugging science fiction among your friends—all you readers! with

LIKES SCIENCE BRIEFS

Dear Ed:

I'm what you might call an "inactive" fan. I've read science fiction for nine years but haven't let myself be heard . . . However, I must protest Arlene Brennan's letter in the June issue, wherein she requests you drop the science articles at the ends of stories and insert letters instead. Those short articles are not only informative, but interesting as well.

I've found that my husband, who frowns on *all* science fiction, as a matter of course always picks up Madge to read the articles!

The stories are good—indeed, most of them are superb, but here's one fan you might lose if you insert letters throughout the magazine instead of in their proper place. Afterall, what do we have

a letter column for?

Mrs. C. Retherford
R. D. 100A
Old Bridge, N. J.

Welcome into the active ranks! And there's no danger of letters replacing the science briefs throughout the magazine. Matter of fact the only thing that can cut into them is the new policy of using as many science fiction cartoons as possible each issue. The cartoons, we're glad to know, have proven highly popular with

SLUMMING, HUH, PAUL?

Dear Bill:

After an interval of over a year I have been talked into buying my sixth copy of Madge. Having spent so much time in the "top bracket of s-f" where we all wear high collars and attach Ph.D.'s to our names, (and have no letter columns!) I felt simply obliged to make up for all the fun I've missed.

First I want to say hello to all your readers. I think you will be hearing from me from time to time now—and don't forget you now have another constant fan.

In your letter column, you feature my favorite type of fan: the neofan. I note that most of Madge's correspondents are newcomers to the ranks. I am one myself, being a steady reader for only two years. But already I'm getting ready my own fanzine, to be called FUNZINE—The Carefree Fanzine .

I agree wholeheartedly with Arlene Brennan in the June letter section about the science fillers. They don't add a thing to Madge

. . .
I like *all* Madge's stories—in the issues I've read, but I'm not going

to take up space with my preferences at this time. I'll wait until I am better acquainted with your writers.

Voting Madge the best balanced s-f magazine on the market—

Paul Wyszowski
129 Lawton Blvd.

Toronto 12 Ont., Canada

Welcome back into the fold, Paul. Heck now, you don't like wearing those stuffy collars, do you? As to top bracket science fiction—you've got it in Madge, but it's not hidden in an ivory tower *wh*

AROUSES HIS—IMAGINATION!

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Your June issue editorial posed an interesting question to me as a reader. Why do I read science fiction? I guess it's because I always think that what happens in all science fiction stories really could happen. To me nothing is impossible—everything is in the realm of reality. Another reason, what other type of literature stimulates the imagination like science fiction? None.

THE STAR LORD was too short. Boyd Ellanby should have lengthened it into a long novel. Even in its present length, however, it's a much better novel than much so-called science fiction now being published in hard covers.

In closing, why don't you write us a story once in awhile?

John Truax
1102 9th St.
Rapid City, S. D.

Confidentially, John we've been asking ourself the same question. And since we can't convince ourself with any valid reasons for not doing so, well, watch the coming is-

sues for a yarn by ye ed . . stop, don't get out the hatchets—yet!
wh

CHARACTERS THAT LIVE

Dear Ed:

Speaking of THE STAR LORD in the June issue, I have to comment that one good thing about the author Boyd Ellanby, is that even though he may not write an entirely interesting story, he creates characters that live. It has always been easy for an author to create a doddering old professor who was still full of pep—a sexy young TV star who was being seduced by the prof—and a lively hard-cut hero who the star was really in love with, but Ellanby outdid himself. I think that the only way to describe his characters is to take a quote from one of A. Conan Doyle's books, THE LOST WORLD. Said quote being from the introduction to the book:

"Novelists, nowadays, are sometimes praised for the art with which they put a character under the microscope and dissect him. Conan Doyle never did this. He never needed to do it. To be dissected a character must be dead. There is nothing dead about George Edward Challenger. Subjected to this process of dissection, it is to

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be feared he would arise bodily from the page and retaliate with a punch in the nose."

I think that best describes the way the characters in *THE STAR LORD* acted throughout the story. None of them were, in any way, manner or form, dead. They reacted to every situation with what would seem to be practically perfect human reactions. They were all humanly capable of error; all could be seduced, bribed, pushed around, or completely fooled, as the case might be. So all in all, I'd say, a job well done.

Ron Ellik
232 Santa Ana
Long Beach 3, Cal.

We agree, Ron, the characterization in Ellanby's THE STAR LORD was superb. The quote you give from Doyle's novel is quite apropos. But what do you mean when you hint that Ellanby didn't write an interesting story? With live characters the story is bound to be interesting—and entertaining—as THE STAR LORD was. wh

THAT STORY COULD HAPPEN!

Dear Ed:

Have just finished reading *THE STAR LORD* in the June issue. It is the first novel that I have really felt "could happen"! I felt as if I were reading a factual account; it somehow reminded me of the sinking of the Titanic.

I'd say *THE STAR LORD* was a great story, and I predict it will be the makings of a book—or be included in an anthology. I would certainly like to see more of Boyd Ellanby's work in *Madge* . even after re-reading the story I hesitated to put it down—it is that

good!

Vee Hampton
4245 Alcott
Denver, Colo.

Re-reading is a good test for a fine story. We're glad to know that THE STAR LORD rang the bell with you—as it did with us. We hope it won't be too long before Boyd Ellanby returns with a new story wh

WHAT HE'S BEEN MISSING!

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Until I read *IMAGINATION* I didn't know what I had been missing. I think that "Madge" is tops in the science fiction field. In the June issue, I particularly enjoyed *DEATH SENTENCE* by William Vine and *RUB-A-DUB-DUB* by Frank Richards. Also, *THE STAR LORD* was right up there too.

How about having a few more short-short stories per issue?

Stephen Bromberg
150 W. 95th St.
New York, N. Y.

Strangely, short-short stories are the hardest to come by. But you'll always find the best available in Madge. Which brings us to coming issues. Don't miss next month's TIME ARMADA by Fox B. Holden, a terrific novel. And following, the November issue features a new Robert Heinlein story with a terrific cover. And after that—but you can see what we mean when we say there's top-notch entertainment coming up—so reserve your copies at your newsdealer, or better yet, subscribe. You'll save money and get your copy ahead of newsstand publication. OK? See you next issue wh

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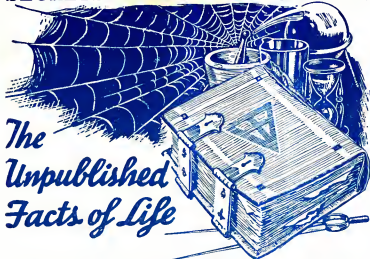
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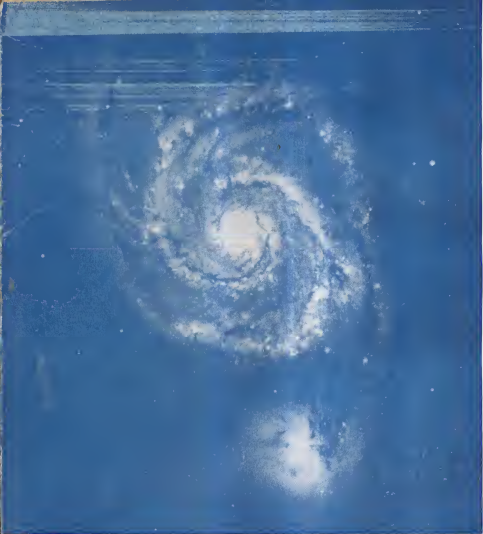
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Another scan
by
cape1736

